Nebraska Chapter of the American Fisheries Society

Flatwater Examiner

Volume XXXIII, Number 1

November 2007

Attention Nebraska Chapter AFS members!

Please mark your calendar for February 12-13, 2008 and commit to attending the NE AFS meeting. We will once again be meeting at the excellent facilities of the Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium near Gretna (note the tentative agenda listed below). As some of you may recall, we had hoped to meet jointly with the Wyoming & Colorado chapters. Unfortunately, travel arrangements became an issue, so we will be holding our own meeting as described above.

Don't forget to bring items for the auction to be held following our meal on Tuesday evening. Once again Nebraska's one and only Dick Turpin has agreed (tentatively) to be our auctioneer. His simple presence makes this a "can't miss event" and a whole lot of fun. This is one of our few Chapter fund raisers, so plan on bringing a lot of auction items and dollar bills. **And whoever has the floor polisher, don't forget to bring it along!**

Inside this issue:

Annual Nebraska Chapter AFS Meeting

February 11-13, 2008 Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium

Tentative Agenda

Monday, February 11	Travel Day
Tuesday February 12	
0800-0900	Registration
0900-1000	Plenary Session
1020-1200	Presentations
1300-1500	Presentations
1530-1700	Business Meeting
1700-1800-	Social Hour/Dinner/Auction
Wednesday February 13	
0800-1200	Presentations

Analysis of Food Habits for Select Species at Wehrspann Reservoir

Report prepared for the NGPC Fisheries Division

by Keith Koupal

Background – The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) Fisheries Division has identified the population of crappie (*Pomoxis spp.*) in Wehrspann Reservoir as "stunted". Crappie have a propensity to exhibit slow growth in many waters, especially smaller ponds (Swingle 1952; Hanson et al. 1983; Mitzner 1984). These populations are often referred to as "stunted" and typically are characterized by a dominant year-class (Rutledge and Barron 1972).

A variety of strategies have been employed in an attempt to improve growth rates. Hanson et al. (1983) used mechanical control with trap nets to successfully reduce the standing population of crappie over 60% by removing 57,000 crappies in one spawning season in a 20.2 ha lake. A commercial harvest effort focussed on black crappie (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*) did improve growth rates of that species in a Florida lake (Schramm et al. 1985), reduced growth rates were exhibited when commercial harvest was suspended (Miller et al. 1990).

Biological control efforts can be employed from a "bottom up" or a "top-down" strategy. Ney (1990) reported improvement of prey deficiencies through use of environmental manipulations, water level manipulations and vegetative control. Attempts to directly augment existing prey populations through stocking or adding a species to address prey deficiencies have typically been unsuccessful (Li et al. 1976; Boxrucker 1986). Threadfin shad (*Dorosoma petenense*) improved crappie growth rate and size structure in two reservoirs (Range 1973; Mosher 1984), but did not improve growth rates and populations in two other reservoirs (Boxrucker 1994; Hale 1996).

The use of predatory pressure to induce a "top-down" density dependent growth response in crappies has been a more common and successful approach by fishery managers. Gablehouse (1984) found an inverse relationship between the proportional stock density of largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) and crappies in small midwestern impoundments. This correlative data supported the field applications that indicated predatory pressure of largemouth bass affects the population structure of crappie (Swingle and Swingle 1967; Tucker 1973). The abundance of northern pike (*Exox lucius*) did positively relate to crappie growth (Willis et al. 1984). Saugeye (female walleye X male sauger *Stizostedion canadense*) successfully improved crappie growth and size structure in an Oklahoma reservoir (Boxrucker 2002). NGPC biologists have attempted to use a top-down approach at Wehrspann Reservoir to control crappie populations and this food habit analysis was conducted to provide evidence of trophic pressures exerted on prey communities.

Methods – Walleye, blue catfish, channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) and largemouth bass were identified as predators of crappie and were sampled in August 2006 with 45-m x 2.5-m monofilament experimental gill nets. The experimental gill nets consisted of six, 18-m panels of 10.16, 7.62, 6.35, 5.08, 3.81 and 2.54-cm bar measure mesh. Gill nets were placed in reservoir sites that were thought to maximize capture of target species. Gill nets were set approximately 60 minutes prior to sunset and checked every 60-120 minutes for four hours past sunset.

Walleye, blue catfish, channel catfish and largemouth bass were weighed (nearest 1.0 g), measured (total length; nearest 1.0 mm), and stomach contents removed using gastric lavage. Stomach contents were preserved in 10% formalin. Diet items were identified to family for invertebrates and to species for fish. Efficiency of the lavage technique was collaborated by physically removing and examining 10 stomachs for each predator species. Numbers of prey items by taxonomic group were recorded for each fish. Frequency of occurrence and percent composition by number was determined for each sampled fish species (Bowen 1996). Due to the high number of invertebrates found in a few food habits samples the niche breadth assessment was not conducted. Pianka's (1973) index of niche overlap was used to determine the amount of diet overlap among walleye, blue catfish, channel catfish and largemouth bass. It is defined as:

$$O_{jk} = \frac{\sum_{i}^{n} p_{ij} p_{ik}}{\sqrt{\sum_{i}^{n} p_{ij}^{2} \sum_{i}^{n} p_{ik}^{2}}}$$

where O_{jk} is Pianka's measure of overlap, p_{ij} is the proportion diet item i is of the total resources used by species j, p_{ik} is the proportion diet item i is of the total resources used by species k, and n is the total number of diet items. The values of this index vary from 0 (no overlap) to 1.0 (complete overlap) with 0.75 indicating high overlap and values less than 0.4 indicating low overlap (Matthews and Hill 1980; Matthews et al. 1982; Ross 1986). Initial analysis pooled all length categories for each species.

Results – A total of 161 target fish were collected for food habits during August 6-8, 2006. Walleye composed 62 of these target fish, while blue catfish, largemouth bass and channel catfish composed 61, 5 and 33, respectively. Percent of target fish with food items ranged from 53-100% for all collected species and the total number of prey items for each target species ranged from 8-782 (Table 1). Confirmation of the lavage technique demonstrated successful collection of all prey items from 100% of walleye stomachs, 90% of blue catfish stomachs and 70% of channel catfish stomachs. All missed prey items were invertebrates.

Table 1. Description of the Number of Each Target Species Collected for Food Habits, the Percent of These Individuals that had Food Habits Present for Each Species and the Total Number of Prey Items Collected for Each Species.

Description Category	Walleye	Blue Catfish	Largemouth Bass	Channel Catfish	Total
Number of Each Species Sampled	62	61	5	33	161
Percent with Food Items in Stomach	53.2%	65.6%	100%	75.8%	N/A
Total Number of Prey Items in Stomach	87	738	8	782	1,615

Invertebrates were found in >70% of walleye, blue catfish and channel catfish stomachs that contained food habits (Table 2). Bluegill and crappie were found as food items in <20% of these species stomachs. Unidentified fish were found in >24% of walleye stomachs. Food habit results for largemouth bass did not display a consistent trend. The percent composition by number showed a greater dependence on invertebrates. Walleye predominantly used Chironomidae, while blue and channel catfish relied heavily on Chaoboridae invertebrate items. Fish prey represented <1% of the total prey items found in blue and channel catfish (Figure 1). Fish

composed >25% of the prey items consumed by walleye, but the majority of these were unidentifiable to the species level as all other/unknown prey items were a fish species (Figure 1).

Table 2. Percent Frequency of Occurrence of Prey Items Found for Each Target Fish Species.

	Prey Item				
Species Sampled	Chironomidae	Chaoboridae	Bluegill	Crappie	Other Prey/ Unidentified Prey
Walleye	87.9%	3%	6.1%	18.2%	24.2%[a]
Blue Catfish	70%	47.5%	10%	5%	12.5%
Largemouth Bass	20%	0%	20%	20%	40%
Channel Catfish	87%	39.1%	4.3%	8.7%	39.1%

[a] All prey items in this category were unidentifiable fish.

Diet overlap was not high between walleye and blue catfish (Pianka Index = 0.16) or walleye and channel catfish (Pianka Index = 0.36). A Pianka Index score below 0.40 is considered low diet overlap (Matthews et al. 1982; Ross 1986). Blue catfish and channel catfish displayed a high diet overlap (Pianka Index = 0.98).

Discussion – This report represents and exploratory effort to determine the prey utilization of four different predators in Wehrspann Reservoir. The diet composition observed by this effort does not indicate a heavy use of crappie or any fish species by these predators. Insufficient individuals of largemouth bass were collected during our study trial, so they will be excluded from discussion due to lack of pertinent information. Walleye appear to have the greatest potential for consuming crappie as their diet demonstrated the highest percentage of fish prey items. Diet overlap analysis confirmed a distinctively different use of available prey items between walleye and both catfish species. Additionally, the diet of larger (>380-mm TL) and smaller (<380-mm TL) walleye were similar. Fifty percent of the larger walleye had fish in their diets while 44% of the smaller walleye had fish in their diets. An increase in walleye densities would exert a greater "top-down" pressure and potentially produce improved crappie growth and size structure, however restrictive regulations may be necessary to develop and maintain sufficient walleye biomass.

Both catfish species relied more on invertebrate prey items in our samples. If our observations are consistent with the true annual diet patterns then both species offer little assistance to the objective of exerting "top-down" pressure to improve crappie population growth and size structure. Additionally, blue catfish and channel catfish displayed high diet overlap (similar use of available resources), suggesting that no ecological advantage is obtained by maintaining both species within this system. Consumption patterns of larger catfish did vary as 27% of blue catfish >450-mm (TL) had fish as a diet item, while only 7% of blue catfish <450-mm (TL) had fish as a diet item. A similar trend was observed in channel catfish as 67% of channel catfish >450-mm (TL) had fish as a diet item and only 9% of channel catfish <450-mm (TL) had fish prey in their collected diet. The variability in consumption of different sized catfish also limits the role of these species to exert "top-down" pressure on crappie populations.

One shortcoming of this sampling effort was the lack of information surrounding the existing prey community. Personal communications with fishery managers for Wehrspann Reservoir indicate that few young-of-the-year (YOY) crappie were collected in the fall 2006 sample. A poor year-class of crappie in the reservoir limits their availability to be consumed, which impacts the observed diet patterns found in this sampling effort.

In summary, the results from this study offer limited insight into food habit patterns for predators in this reservoir. The limited evidence does suggest that blue catfish stockings are ineffective at accomplishing management objectives to control "stunted" crappie populations. Walleye seem to have more potential to provide "top-down" control on crappie populations, but appear to be lacking sufficient densities in this system to accomplish this objective. Largemouth bass may also exert "top-down" control, but a more concentrated effort on their specific food habits needs to be conducted. Fishery managers and research should continue to gather information on this system and investigate a more intensive effort to provide necessary information for management decisions.

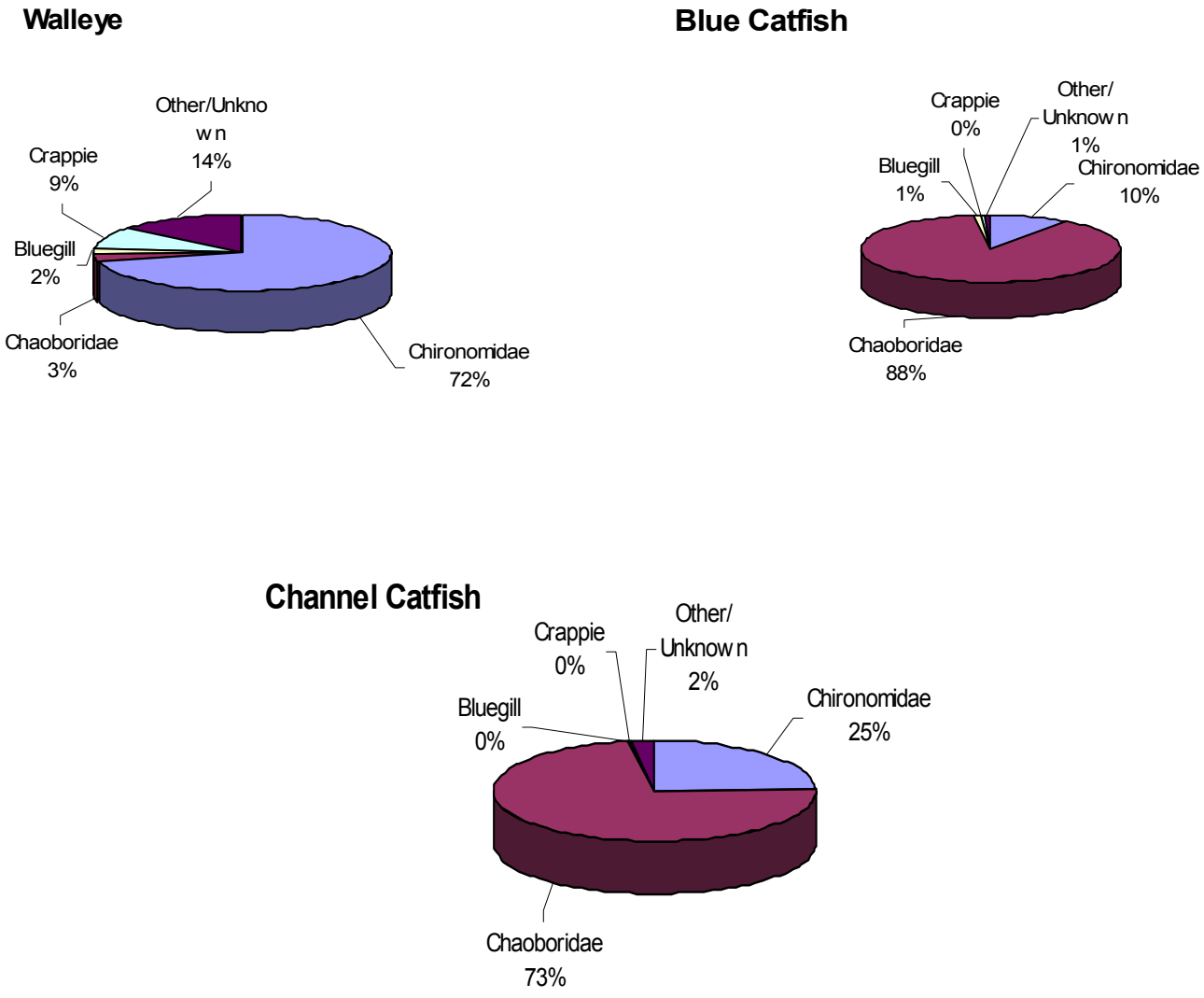

Figure 1. Percent Composition of Prey Items Collected in Stomachs of Walleye, Blue Catfish and Channel Catfish at Wehrspann Reservoir in August 2006.

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The Nebraska AFS would like to thank the following individuals for their willingness to assist with our active committee needs.

Continuing Education and Outreach Committee

Andrea Cade
Lindsey Richters
Justin Haas

Endangered Species Committee

Oliver Cox
Brian Peterson

UPCOMING AFS MEETINGS

2008—Ottawa, ON—August 17-21

2009—Nashville, TN—August 30-September 3

2010-Pittsburgh, PA—September 12-16

NE Chapter American Fisheries Society

Executive Committee Meeting

Aksarben Aquarium, Gretna, Nebraska

October 22, 2007

Minutes (recorded by Larry Pape)

Attendance;

Keith Koupal
Mark Pegg
Joel Klammer
Tony Korth
Larry Pape
Andrea Cade
Donna Waller
Ken Hatten
Ben Neely

Call to Order, Keith Koupal:

Keith Koupal called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

Treasurer Report, Larry Pape:

Larry reported that the checking account balance as of September 28, 2007 stands at $6,938.37. Expenses subsequent the February Annual meeting included; $1,625.00 to the Bob Thomas Fund, $58.85 reimbursed to Randy Winter for award costs, and $8.03 to TierOne for a check endorsement stamp. Income included; $262.00 from the AFS for parent society dues collected, $20.00 from member dues collected, and $22.32 from checking account interest. Larry reported that the CD balance as of October 22, stands at $2,801.24, an increase of $98.11 subsequent to the Annual Meeting in February. The increase the result of interest accrued.

Discussion was initiated by Larry Pape on the status of the CD coming due in November and asked advice on renewing. A suggestion was forwarded to add monies from the checking account to the CD. Consensus conversation determined to wait until after the next annual meeting and then determine the status of the checking and purchase an additional CD if appropriate at that time. Mark Pegg motioned to renew the CD, as-is, when due in November. Seconded by Ken Hatten. Unanimously approved by voice vote.

Joel Klammer motioned to accept the Treasures Report. Seconded by Keith Koupal. Unanimously approved by voice vote.

Old Business:

News Letter. Donna stated she does not have much to include, but it is needed to get one out as soon as possible. It was suggested to acquire and include photos of the Tri-State meeting, annual meeting information and scholarship information.

General discussion included:
A need to extend and invitation to the annual meeting by the scholarship recipient.
An invitation and accommodations to include and inform Marilyn Thomas of scholarship activities. Larry Hutchinson was suggested as the contact.

Mark Pegg notified that Oliver Cox will be acting as NAFS' representative to the NCD awards committee.

Larry Pape suggested an update of membership names to the NAFS website and AFS parent society. Donna Waller, Larry Pape and Schuyler Sampson will meet to accomplish.

New Business:

Ben Neely presented that a University of Nebraska Student Chapter of the American Fisher-

ies Society has been formed, and asked that the by-laws be approved by the NAFS chapter as required by AFS. Discussion included; a suggestion to include this student chapter in the NAFS website, include activities/reports in NAFS newsletter, and requested an annual report at the time of NAFS annual meetings. Keith Koupal motioned to accept the by-laws as presented. Seconded by Joel Klammer. Unanimously approved by voice vote.

Andrea Cade asked that a contribution by NAFS be made toward attracting the speaker, Richard Louv. Andrea noted that Richard Louv is the author of the book *Last Child in the Woods – Saving our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder.* Richard Louv is being brought to Lincoln through the actions of Healthy People Play Outside, as grass-roots local group, and will be potentially speaking at UNL Lied Center as part of the E. N. Thompson lecture series. Potentially April 2007. The group is trying to collect $13,000.00 for the fees and activities. Discussion included: NAFS would expect to be guaranteed inclusion in activities such as luncheon, and ensured tickets for NAFS members? Larry motioned to contribute $500.00 toward attracting Richard Louv as a speaker. Seconded by Tony Korth. Unanimously approved by voice vote.

Mark Pegg presented that Tony Barada, a UNL student, has asked for NAFS to contribute $100.00 toward travel to the Annual Midwest Conference held in Madison, Wisconsin, December 2007. This award would be matched by $100.00 through the NCD. Discussion included: This award will need to be extended to other students, and the deadline for application to NCD is November 1. Mark Pegg indicated he would advertise this opportunity to UNL student through his associations. It was suggested that the award would then be decided by the ExCom. Keith Koupal motioned to award a student with $100.00 to be matched by the NCD toward travel to the Annual Midwest Conference. Seconded by Larry Pape. Unanimously approved by voice vote.

Keith Koupal presented a letter to potentially be supported by NAFS. The letter, written by Gene Zuerlein, seeks a change in the 1944 flood control act by amending the operation of Missouri River reservoirs toward recreation and environmental issues, and away from navigation emphasis. Joel Klammer asked if the draining of Lewis and Clark Lake was part of the issue. Keith responded that it was not. Keith motioned to sign the letter as NAFS. Seconded by Joel Klammer. Unanimously approved by voice vote.

Transfer of President and Secretary/ Treasurer Positions:

It was recognized that as of the completion of this ExCom meeting:

Mark Pegg will act as NAFS President

Tony Korth will act as NAFS President Elect

Keith Koupal will act as NAFS Past President

Ken Hatten will act as NAFS Secretary/ Treasurer

Motion to Adjourn by Mark Pegg. Seconded by Ken Hatten. Unanimously approved by voice vote.

Meeting adjourned 7:00 PM.

2007 Annual Meeting Highlights

BEST PAPER

Title: Natural Resource Amenities and Nebraska's Economy

Author: Don Gabelhouse

BEST POSTER:

Title: Pallid Sturgeon Habitat Assessment

Presenter: Schuyler Sampson

Authors: Schuyler Sampson, Oliver Cox, Gerald Mestl

Aquatic Resources Conservation Award

BIG MAC FLY FISHERS

The Big Mac Fly Fishers is a sub-chapter of the Big Mac Sports Club of Ogallala, NE. The Club's stated goal is "to instruct and promote the art and pleasure of fly fishing to interested people, through dedication to the sport."

Initial educational efforts began at the McConaughy Visitor's Center with weekend fly tying and fly casting clinics. These clinics were open to the public and included both live demonstrations and step-by-step techniques displayed in a video on a large screen during classes. Clinics were eventually expanded to the North Platte Outdoor Sports Show and the Sidney Cabela's store.

Two years ago 20 club members became certified in the Fishing Instructor Certification Program sponsored by the NGPC. Since then, Big Mac Fly Fishers have conducted numerous youth fishing clinics and co-sponsored fishing events with other organizations. They also became charter members of the International Federation of Fly Fishers, which allowed them access to printed materials and video tapes for educational use. The primary focus of these materials is to promote angling etiquette and appreciation for our aquatic resources.

More recently a biology teacher and member of the Big Mac Fly Fishers initiated an introductory aquatic science education class in Oshkosh High School. This class includes both classroom and field trip instruction and includes fly tying, casting, aquatic ecology and water quality topics. Each semester, the biology teacher brings in guest instructors from the Club to provide tutorials on specific elements of the aforementioned topics.

Finally, in an effort to increase both angler and general public awareness of critical water issues in Nebraska, the Club has created a website which posts topical resource related information and associated newspaper articles.

Larry Hutchinson presented this award in March at a meeting held in Ogallala.

STUDENT SUB-CHAPTER OF NE AFS

Ben Neely

Students and faculty at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have been working towards the development of the Cornhusker Student Subunit of the Nebraska Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. The Subunit is focused towards providing networking opportunities and educational experiences to students at UNL but is open to any member of the State Chapter who would like to become involved. Our Subunit bylaws were accepted by the State Chapter in October 2007 and have been submitted to the National Chapter for approval. Pending bylaw approval, we plan to become nationally recognized in March 2008 and have plans for upcoming events including community involvement projects and a student colloquium for area universities. If anyone wishes to be involved in any capacity, please contact Ben Neely (ben.neely@ngpc.ne.gov).

REMINDER: PAY DUES DIRECTLY TO THE CHAPTER!

Make sure your dues are credited to you and the chapter, by sending them directly to the Nebraska AFS Chapter.

Annual dues are $5 for students; $10 for everyone else. Checks should be made payable to "Nebraska Chapter AFS".

Attn: Ken Hatten
Secretary-Treasurer

!!! WANTED !!!

Items for Chapter Newsletter

Including, but not limited to:

- ⇒ Fisheries issues of local, state or national importance
- ⇒ What are our members involved with—publications, projects, etc.
- ⇒ Student projects
- ⇒ Upcoming meetings
- ⇒ Any other items that you think would interest our members

The Nebraska Chapter website - http://www.nebraska.afs.org - continues to be updated. Please check it out and offer your suggestions. You can send your comments right from the web page. Schuyler Sampson is your contact person.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION FORM

NEBRASKA AFS CHAPTER MEETING

February 12-13, 2008

Due to Mark Pegg by January 4, 2008

Title:	
Short Title:	
Author(s):	
Address:	
E-Mail:	
Presentation type (oral or poster):	
Abstract (250 word max):	

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We are On The WEB! http://www.nebraskaafs.org

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