



COLES RUN RESERVOIR

Fisheries Management

Sport Fish Restoration Document F-111-R-15

April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007

Who is responsible for fisheries management at Coles Run Reservoir?

The professionals responsible for fishing programs at Coles Run Reservoir are fisheries biologists at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) in Verona, VA (540-248-9360) and the U. S. Forest Service.

What are the responsibilities of the fisheries biologists?

Fish stocking, fish sampling, water quality monitoring, habitat improvement, angler access, angler surveys, program development, fishing regulation proposals, coordination with Forest Service and Augusta County Service Authority staff, and public outreach.

Who owns Coles Run Reservoir?

The U. S. Forest Service owns the 11.0-acre impoundment and the Augusta County Service Authority manages it as a water supply. Sailing, swimming, and gasoline motors are prohibited.

What kind of fish can I catch from Coles Run Reservoir?

Brook trout. Although Coles Run, above the lake, supports a small native brook trout fishery, these fish do not reproduce in the lake. Therefore, DGIF stocks 11,000 fingerling brook into the lake each spring. There are some minnows that occupy the shallows, but as of this writing, no warm water species inhabit the lake. This is important, because if voracious predators are voluntarily stocked, they would significantly impact the cold water (trout) fishery. Coles Run Reservoir is managed as a “walk-in” fishery. Anglers are required to park off the Coal Road and hike 0.25 mile up an access road to the lake.

Who needs a license to fish?

A state resident, non-resident, or 5-day trip license for those 16 years and older is required at all times. A trout license is not needed to fish at Coles Run Reservoir. A National Forest Permit is needed to fish the lake.

Fishing Regulations		
Species	Daily Limit	Minimum size
Brook Trout	6/day	7 inches

How do the biologists check the fish populations in the lake?

Biologists sample fish populations in a variety of ways. Electrofishing is used in lakes to assess warm water fish (bass and sunfish) populations. Since these type of fish do not populate Coles Run Reservoir, electrofishing is not the tool of choice.

Gill nets can be employed to target sport fish that live in deep or open water, such as trout, catfish, striped bass, and walleye. We set 8 shoreline gill nets on March 2, 2006 and left them in place

overnight. Gill nets are non-selective. In other words, they catch any species of fish that swims into them. We sample with gill nets at Coles Run Reservoir every 3-5 years.

What kind of things do biologists do with the fish after they net them?

Fish are “picked”, identified, sorted, counted, measured, and weighed.

What do biologists do with the information?

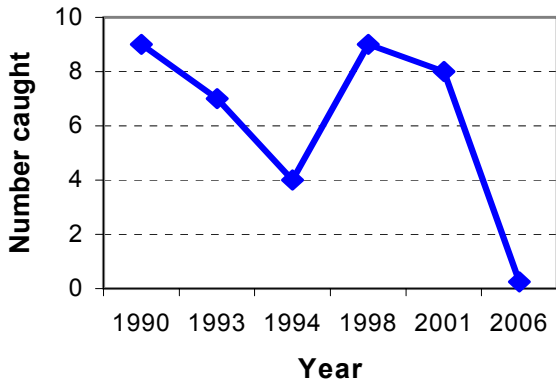
First, density or relative abundance of target species is determined. By normalizing our count by “net night”, we can compare the number of brook trout from sample to sample, from year to year, from lake to lake. Catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) is simply the number of targeted fish caught in one net over one night. The idea is to achieve balance in a fish population. Slow growth can be found by determining a fish’s age and looking at its length at that age. This can be done by counting annuli, or growth “rings”, on hard structures such as scales or otoliths (ear stones). Biologists also divide fish into size groups and use simple ratios to evaluate the balance of medium, keeper, and trophy size fish in the population. These are referred to as population indices, and they can be used to look at an individual species over time. Are fish too thin for their length? “Plumpness” can be measured using an index that compares the weight of an individual fish to those of the same size across the U.S. This is called relative weight and a fish scoring 100 would be considered the right weight for its length. Fishing regulations, such as length limits, are usually derived from periodic sampling and from harvest data that is generated through angler surveys. Often, a minimum length limit, such as 7 inches for trout, is imposed on a lake. Such a regulation is designed to make anglers “throw back the little ones” to allow them to grow a bit before harvest. Another type of length regulation is a “slot size limit”. A slot limit is meant to protect a group of fish (usually of larger size), and allows anglers to harvest younger and trophy fish. This regulation is used to “thin out” plentiful young fish while protecting substantial numbers of quality size fish. This is usually used with warm water fish, not trout.

What does the fish population look like in Coles Run Reservoir?

Brook trout: In 2006, a total of 2 brook trout were caught, for a catch rate of 0.25 fish per net night. This sample was not good in terms of catch rate. In the past, 8-9 fish per net night was common. Look at the blue line graph on the back page to see how our historic samples fared. Brook trout are reaching harvestable size after 2 years of age and some are living to be over 5 years old. Brook trout up to 15 inches in length are occasionally caught in Coles Run Reservoir. Were the trout “skinny” as a result of living in an unproductive lake? The average relative weight was 91. This simply means that the brookies’ weight was proportionate to their length. It is difficult to gauge the trout population in Coles Run Reservoir with a sample of two fish.

DGIF plans to revisit the lake to see if the 2006 sample was an anomaly.

Brook Trout Gill Net CPUE



What other kinds of fisheries improvement work has taken place at Coles Run Reservoir?

Coles Run Reservoir lies within a watershed that is highly acidified. Water quality testing took place in 1993-1994 (James Madison University) to determine whether Coles Run Reservoir, and its sister lake in the Big Levels Management Unit – Mills Creek Reservoir, would be good candidates for a liming project. Detailed water quality analysis was obtained seasonally, and at different depths in both lakes. Although it was determined that Coles Run Reservoir is fairly acidified, the liming project was put on hold. Trout habitat in a lake is determined by the amount of cold, oxygenated water available during later summer. Coles Run Reservoir meets this criteria, and, therefore continues to support good brook trout angling despite its low pH. Important food items are terrestrial insects and water boatmen. The trout stocking strategy was changed in 1996, from releasing 100 yearling brook trout per acre each fall to stocking roughly 1,000 brook trout fingerlings per acre each spring. The change was made to reduce immediate post-stocking harvest for those fish that were longer than 7 inches.

What does the future hold for fishing at Coles Run Reservoir?

DGIF will continue to work with Augusta County and the Forest Service to provide a high quality put-and-grow brook trout fishery at Coles Run Reservoir. We will continue annual stocking of fingerling brook trout and sample the reservoir again soon. We hope you enjoy your fishing experience at Coles Run Reservoir!