

Lake Hawkins

2019 Fisheries Management Survey Report

PERFORMANCE REPORT

As Required by

FEDERAL AID IN SPORT FISH RESTORATION ACT

TEXAS

FEDERAL AID PROJECT F-221-M-4

INLAND FISHERIES DIVISION MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Prepared by:

Jacob Norman, District Management Supervisor

Inland Fisheries Division
Tyler District, Tyler, Texas

Carter Smith
Executive Director

Craig Bonds
Director, Inland Fisheries

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Survey and Management Summary

Fish populations in Lake Hawkins were surveyed in 2019 using electrofishing. Anglers were surveyed from March – May 2020 with a creel survey. Historical data are presented with the 2019-2020 data for comparison. This report summarizes the results of the surveys and contains a management plan for the reservoir based on those findings.

Reservoir Description: Lake Hawkins is a 634-acre impoundment located on Little Sand Creek in the Sabine River Basin approximately 5 miles northwest of Hawkins, Texas. Primary water uses include flood control and recreation. Habitat features consist of natural shoreline, standing timber, and submerged and floating vegetation. Coontail and Eurasian watermilfoil were the predominant aquatic vegetation present in the reservoir in 2019.

Management History: Important sport fish include Largemouth Bass and crappie. Florida Largemouth Bass were initially stocked in 1975 and last stocked in 2010 to improve the trophy potential of the reservoir. Grass Carp were stocked in 2006, 2011 and 2014 to control hydrilla abundance.

Fish Community

- **Prey species:** Threadfin Shad were present in the reservoir. Electrofishing catch rate of Gizzard Shad was low. Electrofishing catch rate of Bluegill was moderate and most were less than 6-inches long. Collectively, sunfish are the primary forage in the reservoir.
- **Catfishes:** Channel Catfish were stocked most recently in 1992, but very few fish have been collected during population surveys or documented during creel surveys. Catfish recruitment is likely limited by Largemouth Bass predation.
- **Largemouth Bass:** Largemouth Bass were moderately abundant and displayed both a balanced size structure and good body condition. Largemouth Bass growth to legal length was moderate (average age at 14 inches was 3.0 years). Largemouth Bass accounted for 74% of directed effort during the 2020 spring creel survey.
- **Crappie:** Black Crappie historically occurred in low abundance and very few were collected during population surveys. Black Crappie accounted for 14% of directed effort during the 2020 spring creel survey.

Management Strategies: Evaluate length-at-age for Largemouth Bass up to 500mm. Collect tournament data to monitor frequency of Largemouth Bass larger than 500 mm caught. Conduct annual vegetation surveys to monitor coverage and distribution of hydrilla and Eurasian watermilfoil and make appropriate management recommendations based on survey findings. Inform the public about the negative impacts of aquatic invasive species and work with controlling authority as needed to provide technical guidance with aquatic nuisance species. Continue managing all sport fish under statewide harvest regulations.

Introduction

This document is a summary of fisheries data collected from Lake Hawkins in 2019-2020. The purpose of the document is to provide fisheries information and make management recommendations to protect and improve the sport fishery. While information on other fish were collected, this report deals primarily with major sport fish and important prey species. Historical data are presented with the 2019-2020 data for comparison.

Reservoir Description

Lake Hawkins is a 634-acre impoundment constructed in 1962 on Little Sandy Creek, a tributary of the Sabine River. It is located in Wood County approximately 5 miles northwest of Hawkins, Texas and is operated and controlled by Wood County. Primary water uses are flood control and recreation. Lake Hawkins is mesotrophic with a mean TSI chl-*a* of 46.98 (Texas Commission on Environment Quality 2020). Habitat at time of sampling consisted of natural shoreline and both native and non-native submersed and emergent vegetation. Abundant boat docks and patches of standing timber provide additional habitat for fish. Other descriptive characteristics for Lake Hawkins are in Table 1.

Angler Access

Lake Hawkins has 4 public boat ramps and no private boat ramps. Additional boat ramp characteristics are in Table 2. Shoreline access is available at all boat ramps and within the county-operated park near the dam.

Management History

Previous management strategies and actions: Management strategies and actions from the previous survey report (Storey and Bennett 2016) included:

1. Collect available data on Largemouth Bass over 8 lbs. caught by anglers to help justify future stockings of Florida Largemouth Bass.
Action: A roving creel survey was conducted in March – May 2020.
2. Conduct comprehensive vegetation survey every four years and additional Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) surveys, as needed.
Action: A comprehensive survey was conducted in 2019; additional ANS survey was conducted in 2017.

Harvest regulation history: Sport fish in Lake Hawkins are managed under statewide regulations (Table 3).

Stocking history: Channel Catfish were introduced in 1967 and stocked three times since. Florida Largemouth Bass (FLMB) were initially introduced in 1975 and stocked again in 1990 and 2010. Blue Catfish were stocked in 1982. Smallmouth Bass were stocked five times between 1987 and 1991, but the population did not develop. Triploid Grass Carp were stocked by Wood County in 2006, 2011, and 2014 as a part of a management plan to help manage hydrilla. A complete stocking history is found in Table 4.

Vegetation/habitat management history: Lake Hawkins has historically harbored a rich diversity of native aquatic plants. Hydrilla and Eurasian watermilfoil have been documented in Lake Hawkins for over 15 years. Hydrilla reached its historic level (482 acres) in 2006, covering approximately 76% of the reservoir surface area. To reduce hydrilla coverage, the controlling authority stocked 1,000 Triploid Grass Carp in May 2006 and applied Sonar herbicide in April 2007. Annual vegetation surveys conducted from 2008 through 2015 monitored the distribution of hydrilla in Lake Hawkins by tracking the percentage of sample stations where hydrilla was observed (Bennett and Storey 2015). Additional stockings of Triploid Grass Carp occurred in fall 2011 (N = 200) and in the fall of 2014 (N = 100).

Water transfer: No interbasin transfers exist.

Methods

Surveys were conducted to achieve survey and sampling objectives in accordance with the objective-based sampling (OBS) plan for Lake Hawkins (Storey and Bennett 2016). Primary components of the OBS plan are listed in Table 5. All surveys were conducted according to the Fishery Assessment Procedures (TPWD, Inland Fisheries Division, unpublished manual revised 2017).

Electrofishing – Largemouth Bass, sunfishes, Gizzard Shad, and Threadfin Shad were collected by electrofishing (1.2 hours at 14, 5-min stations). Catch per unit effort (CPUE) for electrofishing was recorded as the number of fish caught per hour (fish/h) of actual electrofishing.

Statistics – Sampling statistics (CPUE for various length categories), structural indices [Proportional Size Distribution (PSD), terminology modified by Guy et al. 2007], and condition indices [relative weight (W_r)] were calculated for target fishes according to Anderson and Neumann (1996). Index of Vulnerability (IOV) was calculated for Gizzard Shad (DiCenzo et al. 1996). Standard error (SE) was calculated for structural indices and IOV. Relative standard error (RSE = 100 X SE of the estimate/estimate) was calculated for all CPUE and creel statistics.

Creel survey – A roving creel survey was conducted March through May 2020. Angler interviews were conducted on 5 weekend days and 4 weekdays to assess angler use and fish catch/harvest statistics in accordance with the Fishery Assessment Procedures (TPWD, Inland Fisheries Division, unpublished manual revised 2017).

Habitat – A comprehensive vegetation survey was conducted in 2019. Habitat was assessed with the digital shapefile method (TPWD, Inland Fisheries Division, unpublished manual revised 2017).

Results and Discussion

Habitat: A diverse mix of native and nonnative vegetation covered approximately 32% (201 acres) of the reservoir's surface during the 2019 survey. The majority of vegetative habitat consisted of mixed stands of coontail, variable leaf milfoil and Eurasian watermilfoil (Table 6). Hydrilla was not observed during the 2019 survey suggesting the recent Grass Carp stockings were effective in managing hydrilla. The last structural habitat survey was conducted in 2015 (Storey and Bennett 2016).

Creel: Anglers were only observed targeting Largemouth Bass and crappie during the creel survey; Largemouth Bass accounted for 74% of all directed effort (Table 7). Total angling effort was 12,316 hours during the spring quarter and anglers spent an estimated \$62,350 in directed expenditures (Table 8).

Prey species: Sunfishes remain the primary prey base in Lake Hawkins, and to a lesser extent Threadfin and Gizzard Shad. Electrofishing catch rates of Redbreast Sunfish, Bluegill and Redear Sunfish were 44.6/h, 136.3/h and 27.4/h, respectively (Figures 1-3). Most Bluegill were six inches or less, while both Redear and Redbreast Sunfish over 8 inches were collected, suggesting the potential for a quality sunfish fishery. Shad abundance is likely limited by clear water and moderate productivity. Index of Vulnerability for Gizzard Shad (IOV = 67) was higher than previous surveys (IOV = 0), but CPUE remained low.

Largemouth Bass: The 2019 Largemouth Bass electrofishing catch rate (74.6/h) indicated moderate abundance and was slightly higher than the previous two surveys (2015 and 2017; Figure 5). Size structure (PSD = 67) improved relative to prior survey years and body condition was good ($W_r \geq 90$) for most size classes in 2019. Growth was moderate; average age at 14 inches (13.6 to 14.8 inches) was 3 years (N = 12; range = 2-4 years). Despite quality habitat and stable recruitment, Largemouth Bass growth and overall size is potentially limited by the moderate productivity and limited forage base in the reservoir.

Directed fishing effort, catch per hour, and total harvest for Largemouth Bass was 9,122 h, 0.5 fish/h, and 118 fish, respectively, from March – May 2020 (Table 9). Harvested fish ranged in length from 14—17 inches (Figure 6). Largemouth accounted for 14% of total directed fishing effort during the creel survey.

Crappie: Black Crappie were present in the reservoir and provided a popular fishery. Directed fishing effort, catch per hour, and total harvest for Crappie was 1,780 h, 0.3 fish/h, and 665 fish, respectively, from March – May 2020 (Table 10). Harvested fish ranged in length from 10—12 inches (Figure 6). Crappie accounted for 74% of total directed fishing effort during the creel survey.

Fisheries Management Plan for Lake Hawkins, Texas

Prepared – July 2020

ISSUE 1: Despite quality littoral habitat and stable recruitment, the Largemouth Bass population consists primarily of smaller fish. Previous management reports suggested growth may be slow and limiting trophy fish potential. While relative weights suggest adequate prey availability, comprehensive age and growth data may help identify if growth-related factors are limiting the abundance of larger fish.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. Conduct a category 3 age and growth sample (5 fish per 10 mm) to calculate mean length-at-age for Largemouth Bass < 500 mm
2. Attempt to collect tournament data to document catches of larger fish (> 500 mm) that are rarely documented with traditional sampling gear.

ISSUE 2: Many invasive species threaten aquatic habitats and organisms in Texas and can adversely affect the state ecologically, environmentally, and economically. For example, zebra mussels can multiply rapidly and attach themselves to any available hard structure, restricting water flow in pipes, fouling swimming beaches, and plugging engine cooling systems. Giant salvinia and other invasive vegetation species can form dense mats, interfering with recreational activities like fishing, boating, skiing, and swimming. The financial costs of controlling and/or eradicating these types of invasive species are significant. Additionally, the potential for invasive species to spread to other river drainages and reservoirs via watercraft and other means is a serious threat to all public waters of the state.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

1. Cooperate with the controlling authority to post appropriate signage at access points around the reservoir.
2. Educate the public about invasive species through the use of media and the internet, when appropriate.
3. Make a speaking point about invasive species when presenting to constituent and user groups.
4. Keep track of (i.e., map) existing and future inter-basin water transfers to facilitate potential invasive species responses.
5. Make management recommendations to Wood County if hydrilla or Eurasian watermilfoil increases to levels requiring control. Options for invasive species management could include stocking of additional Triploid Grass Carp or herbicide applications.
6. Provide progress reports on the status of hydrilla and Eurasian watermilfoil to the Wood County Commissioner and the Association of Lake Hawkins Property Owners as appropriate.

Objective-Based Sampling Plan and Schedule (2020–2024)

Sport fish, forage fish and other important fishes

Sport fish in Lake Hawkins include Largemouth Bass, Channel Catfish, and crappie. Sunfish are the primary prey species.

Low-density fisheries

Crappie and Channel Catfish have historically been present in the reservoir, however population surveys have produced low and variable catch rates. Historical data suggests it would take greater than 50 net nights to estimate size structure or relative abundance with 80% confidence. Creel data suggested minimal directed effort towards either species.

Survey objectives, fisheries metrics and sampling objectives

Largemouth Bass: Largemouth Bass are the most popular sport fish in Lake Hawkins. Due to the importance and popularity of this fishery, Largemouth Bass trend data on relative abundance, size structure, body condition, and growth (CPUE, PSD, W_r , average age at 14 inches) will continue to be monitored with biennial nighttime electrofishing, alternating between spring (2021) and fall (2023) surveys. Historical fall electrofishing data suggests that sampling objectives ($RSE \leq 25$, $N > 50$) can be met with 12-18 randomly selected 5-minute sampling sites. An additional daytime survey will be conducted to collect specimens for a category 3 age and growth analysis. Fin clips will be taken from 30 individuals for genetic analysis during the fall 2023 survey.

Prey Species: Threadfin Shad and sunfish are important prey species in Lake Hawkins. Long-term trend data is desired for these populations to evaluate their relative abundance (CPUE) and size structure (PSD for sunfishes). Relative weights of the Largemouth Bass population, along with size structure of Bluegill will be used to gauge prey fish availability for sport fishes from electrofishing sampling conducted in fall 2023. No sampling objectives will be set for prey species.

Literature Cited

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Characteristics of Lake Hawkins, Texas.

Characteristic	Description
Year constructed	1962
Controlling authority	Wood County
County	Wood
Reservoir type	Tributary
Mean depth	15.0 ft.
Maximum depth	30.0 ft.
Shoreline Development Index	5.8
Conductivity	130 μ S/cm
Secchi disc range	8-12 ft.

Table 2. Boat ramp characteristics for Lake Hawkins, Texas July 2019.

Boat ramp	Latitude Longitude (dd)	Public	Parking capacity (N)	Elevation at end of boat ramp (ft.)	Condition
Park at Dam	32.61388 -95.25509	Y	100	370	Excellent, no access issues
Fish Hawke Point	32.62180 -95.25306	Y	50	369	Excellent, no access issues
North Ramp	32.63659 -95.26307	Y	5	369	Excellent, no access issues
CR 3497	32.62273 -95.24274	Y	15	369	Excellent, no access issues

Table 3. Harvest regulations for Lake Hawkins, Texas.

Species	Bag Limit	Length limit
Catfishes: Channel and Blue, their hybrids and subspecies	25 (in any combination)	12-inch minimum
Catfish, Flathead	5	18-inch minimum
Bass, Largemouth	5	14-inch minimum
Crappie: White and Black, their hybrids and subspecies	25 (in any combination)	10-inch minimum

Table 4. Stocking history of Lake Hawkins, Texas. FRY = fry; FGL = fingerling; ADL = adult; UNK = unknown.

Species	Year	Number	Size
Blue Catfish	1982	56,154	FGL
Channel Catfish	1967	4,000	UNK
	1981	54,500	UNK
	1982	55,000	UNK
	1992	8,028	FGL
	Total	121,528	
Smallmouth Bass	1987	21,500	FGL
	1988	157,300	FRY
	1989	1,550	FGL
	1989	38,476	FRY
	1991	3,740	FGL
	Total	222,566	
Threadfin Shad	1991	500	ADL
Florida Largemouth Bass	1975	55,000	FGL
	1990	80,546	FRY
	2010	20,800	FGL
	Total	156,346	
Triploid Grass Carp	2006	1,000	ADL
	2011	200	ADL
	2014	100	ADL
	Total	1,300	

Table 5. Objective-based sampling plan components for Lake Hawkins, Texas 2019–2020.

Gear/target species	Survey objective	Metrics	Sampling objective
<i>Electrofishing</i>			
Largemouth Bass	Relative Abundance	CPUE–Stock	RSE-Stock ≤ 25
	Size structure	PSD, length frequency	$N \geq 50$ stock
	Age-and-growth	Age at 14 inches	$N = 13, 13.0 - 14.9$ inches
	Condition	W_r	10 fish/inch group (max)
Bluegill ^a	Relative Abundance	CPUE–Total	RSE ≤ 25
	Size structure	PSD, length frequency	$N \geq 50$
Gizzard and Threadfin Shad	Presence/Absence		
<i>Creel</i>			
Largemouth Bass	Trend information on angler utilization	Angler effort, CPUE, total harvest and size composition	
Catfish	Trend information on angler utilization	Angler effort, CPUE, total harvest and size composition	
Crappie	Trend information on angler utilization	Angler effort, CPUE, total harvest and size composition	

^a No additional effort was expended to achieve an RSE ≤ 25 for CPUE of sunfish not reached from designated Largemouth Bass sampling effort.

Table 6. Survey of aquatic vegetation, Lake Hawkins, Texas, 2017 and 2019. The 2017 survey was conducted via the Random Point Method and 2019 survey utilized the digital shapefile method. Surface area (acres) is listed with percent of total reservoir surface area in parentheses.

Vegetation Type	2017	2019
Native emergent ^a		17 (3)
Submersed ^b		163 (26)
Non-native		
Eurasian watermilfoil (Tier III)*	25 (4)	21 (3)
Hydrilla (Tier III)*	14 (2)	

^a Maidencane, Spatterdock, Water willow and White water lily

^b Bladderwort, Chara, Coontail, Variable leaf watermilfoil and Pondweed

* Tier III is Watch Status

Table 7. Percent directed angler effort by species for Lake Hawkins, Texas. Survey period was March-May 2020.

Species	2020
Largemouth Bass	74.1
Crappie	14.4
Anything	11.5

Table 8. Total fishing effort (h) for all species and total directed expenditures at Lake Hawkins, Texas. Survey period was March-May 2020. Relative standard error is in parentheses.

Creel statistic	2020
Total fishing effort	12,316 (37)
Total directed expenditures	\$62,350 (74)

Redbreast Sunfish

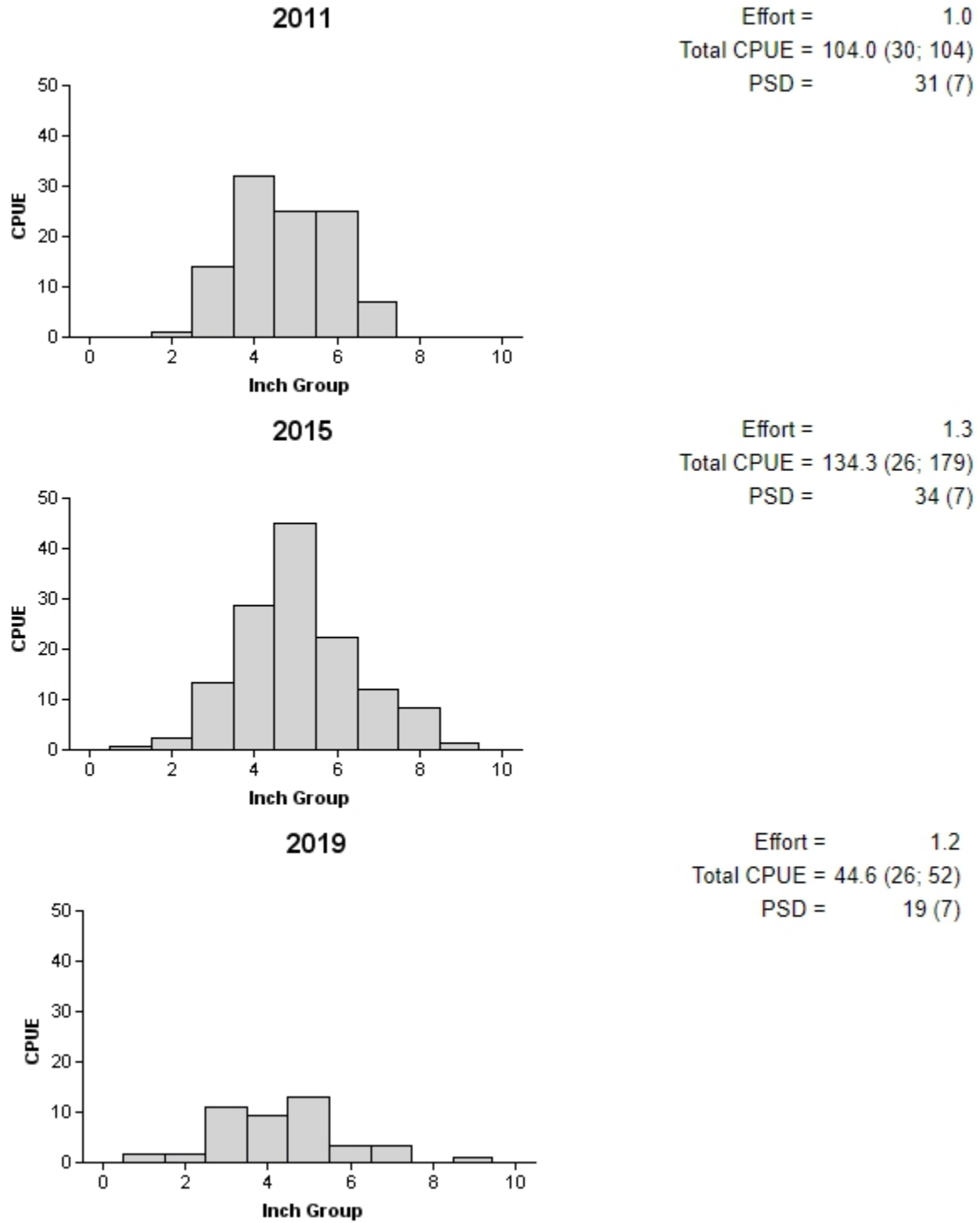


Figure 1. Number of Redbreast Sunfish caught per hour (CPUE) and population indices (RSE and N for CPUE and SE for size structure are in parentheses) for fall electrofishing surveys, Lake Hawkins, Texas, 2011, 2015, and 2019.

Bluegill

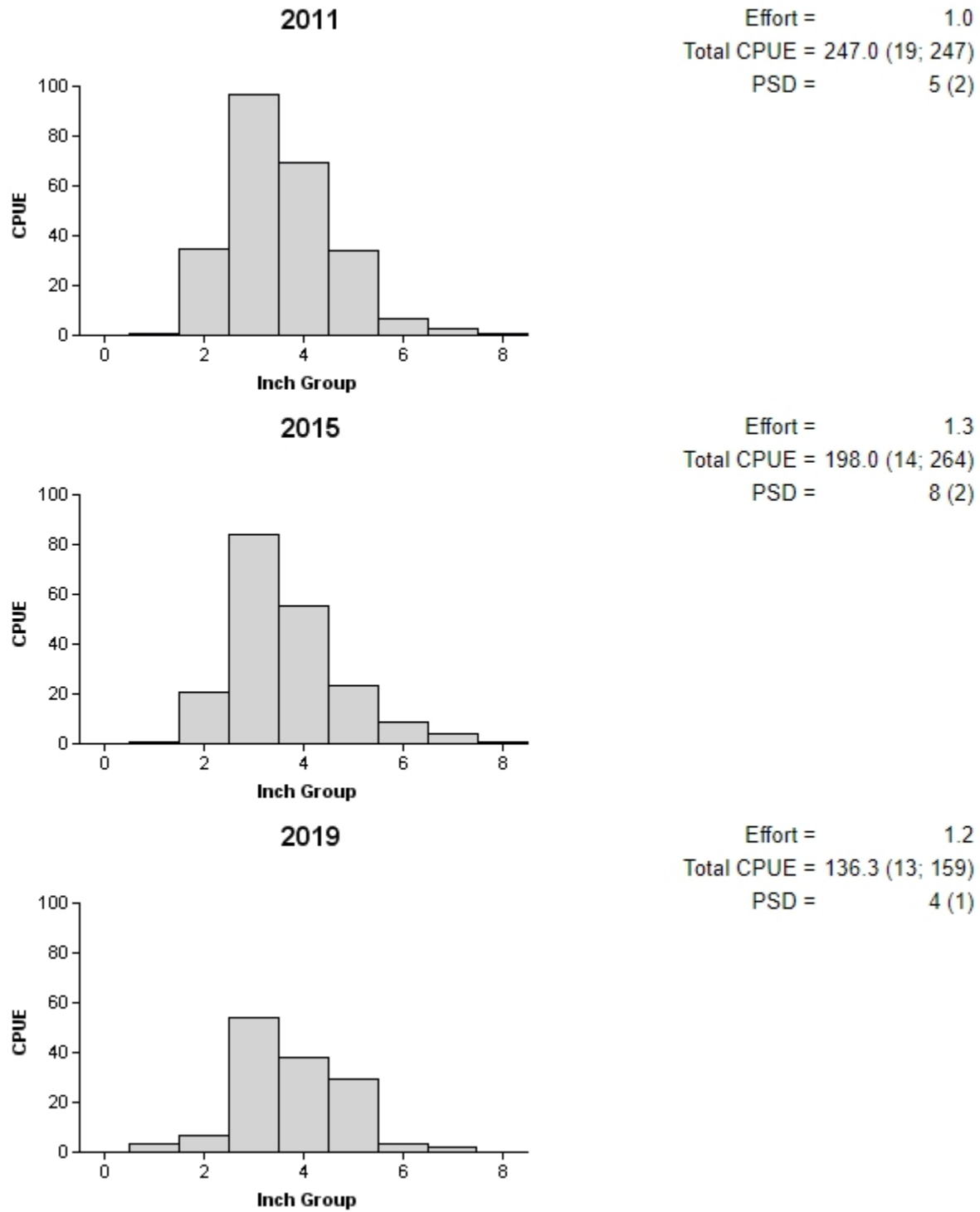


Figure 2. Number of Bluegill caught per hour (CPUE) and population indices (RSE and N for CPUE and SE for size structure are in parentheses) for fall electrofishing surveys, Lake Hawkins, Texas, 2011, 2015, and 2019.

Redear Sunfish

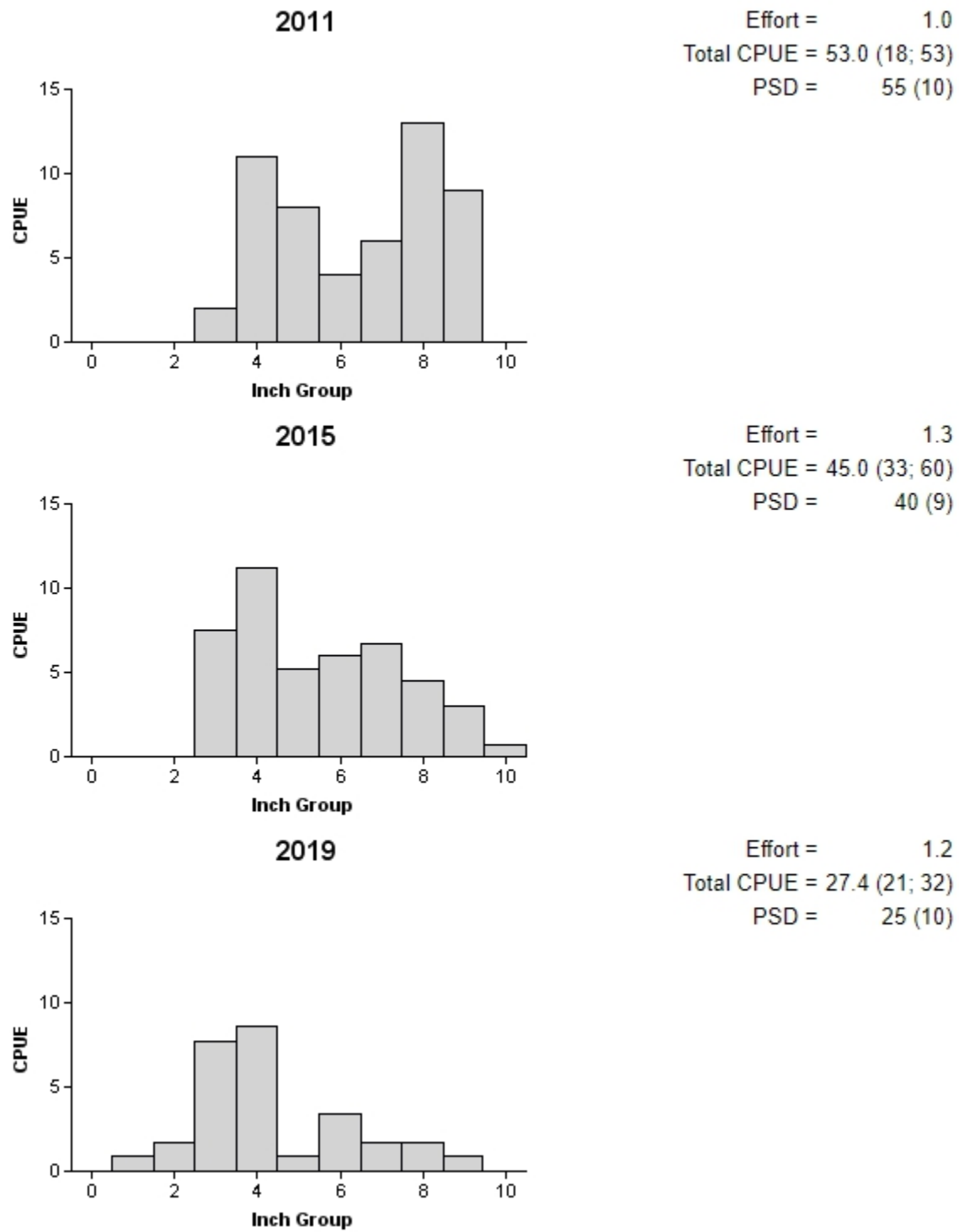


Figure 3. Number of Redear Sunfish caught per hour (CPUE) and population indices (RSE and N for CPUE and SE for size structure are in parentheses) for fall electrofishing surveys, Lake Hawkins, Texas, 2011, 2015, and 2019.

Largemouth Bass

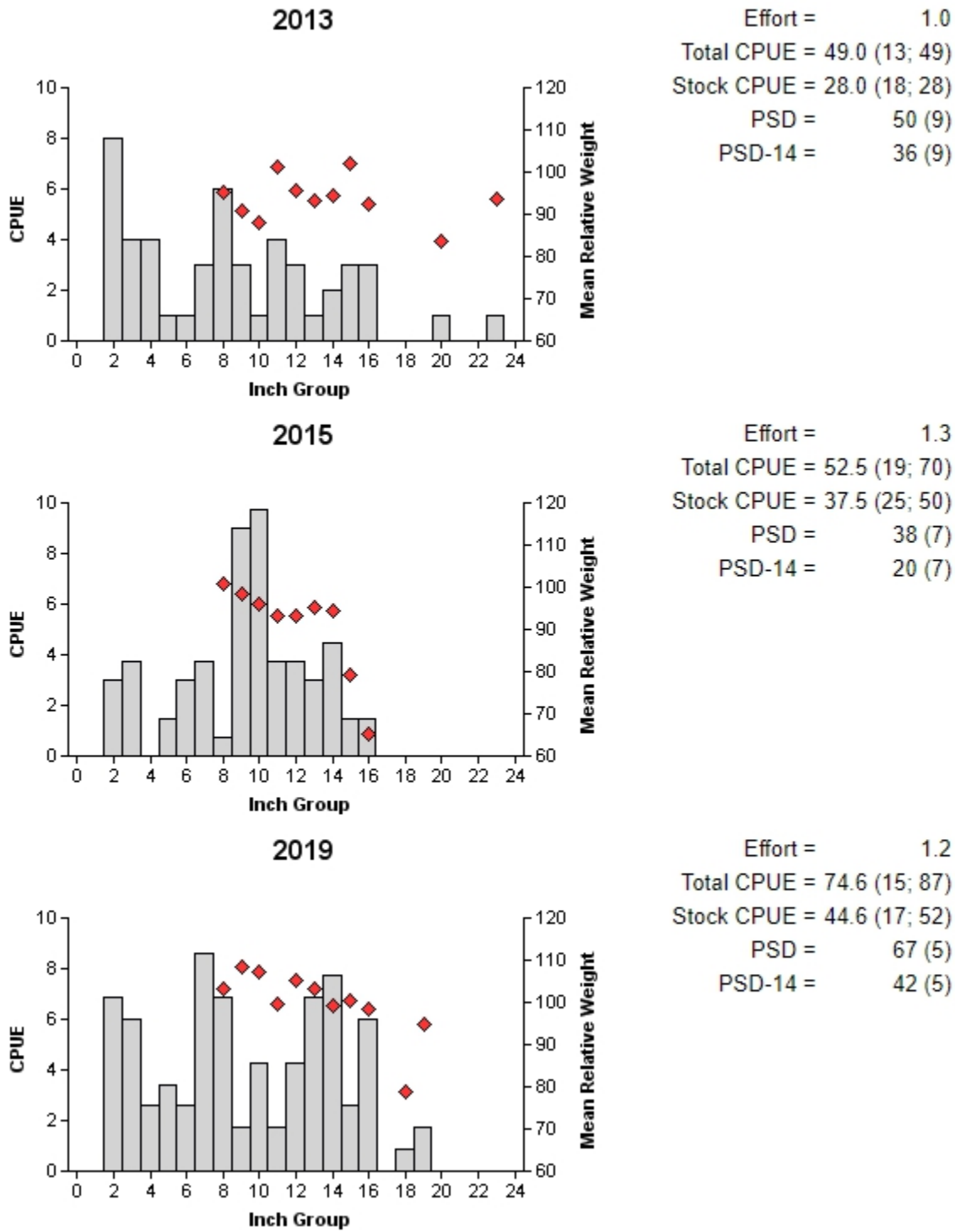


Figure 4. Number of Largemouth Bass caught per hour (CPUE), mean relative weights (diamonds), and population indices (RSE and N for CPUE and SE for size structure are in parentheses) for fall electrofishing surveys, Lake Hawkins, Texas, 2013, 2015 and 2019.

Table 9. Creel survey statistics for Largemouth Bass at Lake Hawkins, Texas, from March through May 2020. Catch rate is for all anglers targeting Largemouth Bass. Harvest is partitioned by the estimated number of fish harvested by non-tournament anglers and the number of fish retained by tournament anglers for weigh-in and release. The estimated number of fish released by weight category is for anglers targeting Largemouth Bass. Relative standard errors (RSE) are in parentheses.

Creel Survey Statistic	2020
Surface area (acres)	634
Directed angling effort (h)	
Tournament	613 (64)
Non-tournament	8,509 (37)
All black bass anglers combined	9,122 (37)
Angling effort/acre	14.4 (37)
Catch rate (number/h)	0.5 (22)
Harvest	118 (78)
Release by weight	
<4.0 lbs	4,776 (40)
4.0-6.9 lbs	44 (126)
7.0-9.9 lbs	0
≥10.0 lbs	0
Percent legal released (non-tournament)	87

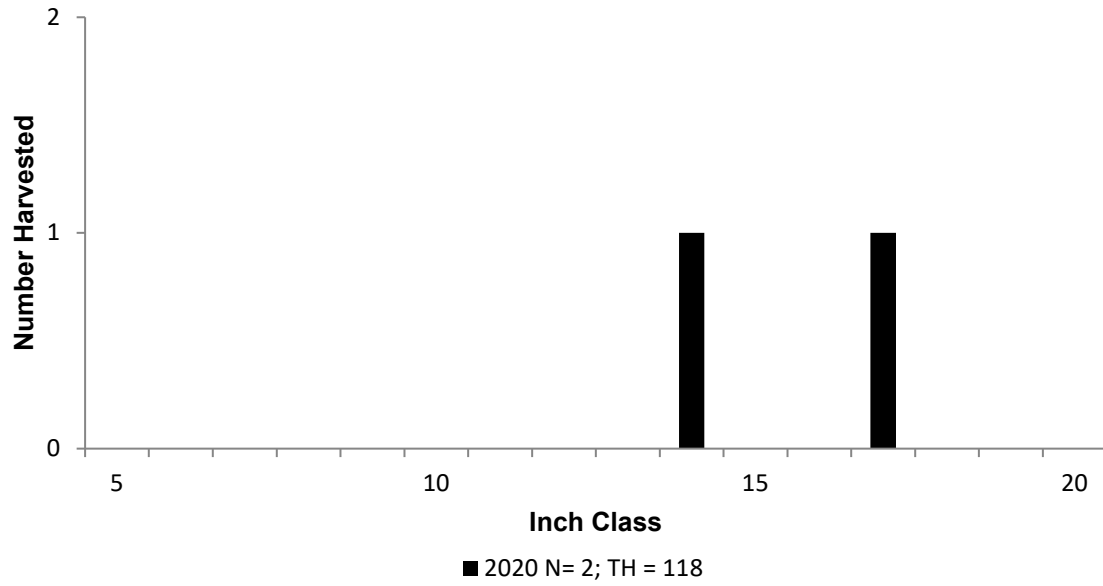
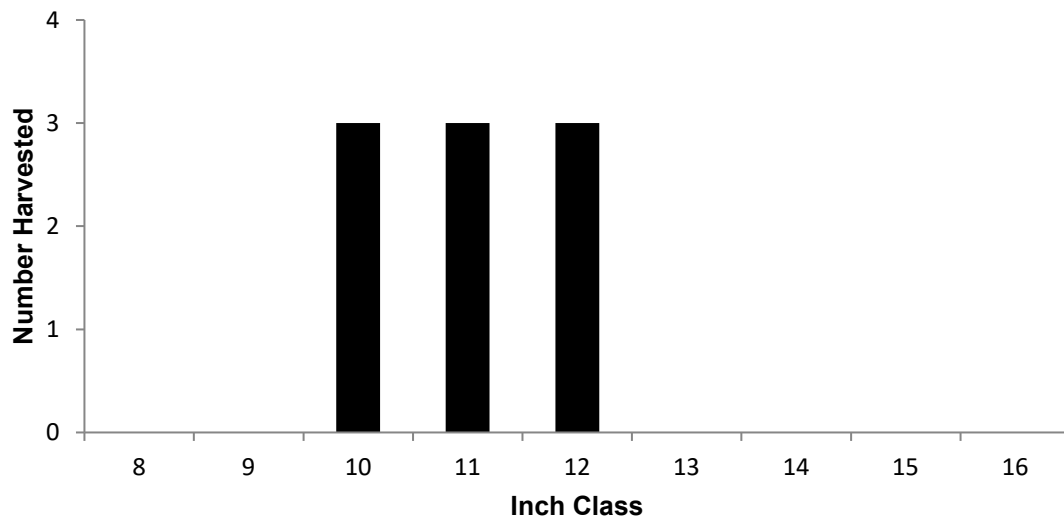


Figure 5. Length frequency of non-tournament harvested Largemouth Bass observed during creel surveys at Lake Hawkins, Texas, March through May 2020, all anglers combined. N is the number of harvested Largemouth Bass observed during creel surveys, and TH is the estimated harvest for the creel.

Black Crappie

Table 10. Creel survey statistics for Crappie at Lake Hawkins, Texas, March through May 2020. Total catch per hour is for anglers targeting crappie and total harvest is the estimated number of crappie harvested by all anglers. Relative standard errors (RSE) are in parentheses.

Creel Survey Statistic	2020
Surface area (acres)	634
Directed effort (h)	1,780 (44)
Directed effort/acre	2.8 (44)
Total catch per hour	0.3 (85)
Total harvest	665 (60)
Harvest/acre	1.0 (60)
Percent legal released	0



■ 2020 N=9 ; TH=665

Figure 6. Length frequency of harvested Black Crappie observed during creel surveys at Lake Hawkins, Texas, from March through May 2020, all anglers combined. N is the number of harvested Black Crappie observed during creel surveys, and TH is the total estimated harvest for the creel period.

Proposed Sampling Schedule

Table 11. Proposed sampling schedule for Lake Hawkins, Texas. Survey period is June through May. Standard surveys denoted by S and additional surveys denoted by A.

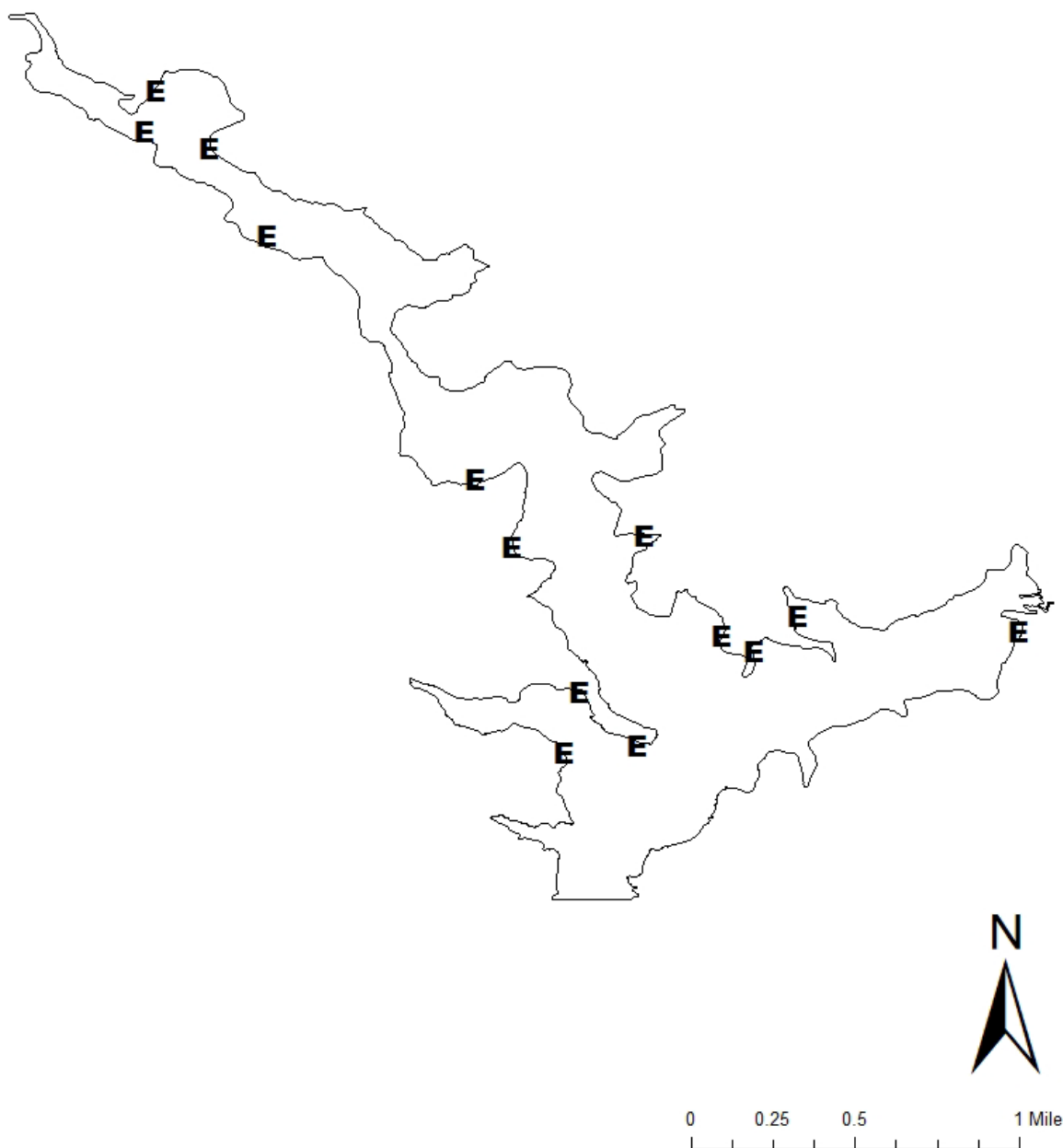
	Survey year			
	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Angler Access				S
Vegetation	A	A	A	S
Electrofishing – Fall				S
Electrofishing – Spring (Bass Only)	A			
Report				S

APPENDIX A – Catch rates for all species from all gear types

Number (N) and catch rate (CPUE) (RSE in parentheses) of all target species collected from all gear types from Lake Hawkins, Texas, 2019. Sampling effort was 1.2 hours of electrofishing.

Species	N	CPUE
Gizzard Shad	15	12.86 (49)
Threadfin Shad	146	125.14 (19)
Redbreast Sunfish	52	44.57 (26)
Bluegill	159	136.29 (13)
Longear Sunfish	2	1.71 (68)
Redear Sunfish	32	27.43 (21)
Warmouth	5	4.29 (47)
Largemouth Bass	87	74.57 (15)

APPENDIX B – Map of sampling locations



Location of sampling sites, Lake Hawkins, Texas, 2019. Electrofishing stations are indicated by E. Water level was near full pool at time of sampling.



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