



# McPhee Reservoir

## FISH SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT DATA

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**General Information:** McPhee Reservoir is Colorado's second largest reservoir at 4,470 surface acres. McPhee has developed a reputation as a fine Smallmouth Bass fishery with a number of local and regional fishing tournaments held at the reservoir each year. Other fish species commonly caught include Rainbow Trout, Kokanee Salmon, Black Crappie, Yellow Perch and occasionally Largemouth Bass and Walleye.

**Location:** Montezuma County, a few miles NW of Dolores, CO and approximately 10 miles north of Cortez, Colorado

**Recreational Management:** USFS (970) 882-6800.

**Fishery Management:** Warm and Cold water species. Colorado Parks and Wildlife Area Office 970-247-0855

**Annual Survey Data:** [\(see page 3\)](#)

### Amenities and General Info.

- Boat Ramps (Main and House Creek; inspection stations present)
- Picnic Areas
- Camping
- Restrooms
- Doc's Marina
- Hiking trails

### Regulations

- Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass 10-15 inches must be released. Daily bag limit for bass under or over the slot is 5.
- Daily bag for trout is 4.
- Daily bag for walleye is UNLIMITED.
- Daily bag limit for Kokanee Salmon is 10 (see snagging below)
- Bag limit for Northern Pike and Yellow Perch is UNLIMITED.
- Snagging Kokanee is not permitted in the Dolores River until Nov. 15th.

### Boats

- The majority of shoreline is not accessible by vehicle or foot. Boats are recommended.
- If your boat has been out of the state in the last 30 days it must be inspected for unwanted aquatic nuisance species before launching. Inspections are available at the Main Boat Ramp.

### Previous Stocking

#### 2019

Rainbow Trout (31,009 catchables)  
Kokanee Salmon (200K fingerlings)  
Black Crappie (55,894 2" fish)

Smallmouth Bass are self-sustaining and do not require annual stocking.

#### 2020

Rainbow Trout (45,692 catchables)  
Kokanee Salmon (200,515 2 inch)  
Black Crappie (112,792 2 inch)

#### 2021

Rainbow Trout (33,627 catchables)  
Kokanee Salmon (200,732 2 inch)  
Black Crappie (114,723 2 inch)

### Sportfishing Notes

#### Smallmouth Bass

- Smallmouth Bass fishing is the primary draw in the late spring early summer. Fish the inundated rocky shorelines up House, Beaver, and Plateau creek arms of the reservoir using crayfish imitations, topwater, or jigs.

#### Rainbow Trout

- Trout fishing is generally good year round using traditional baits or trolling near shoreline areas.

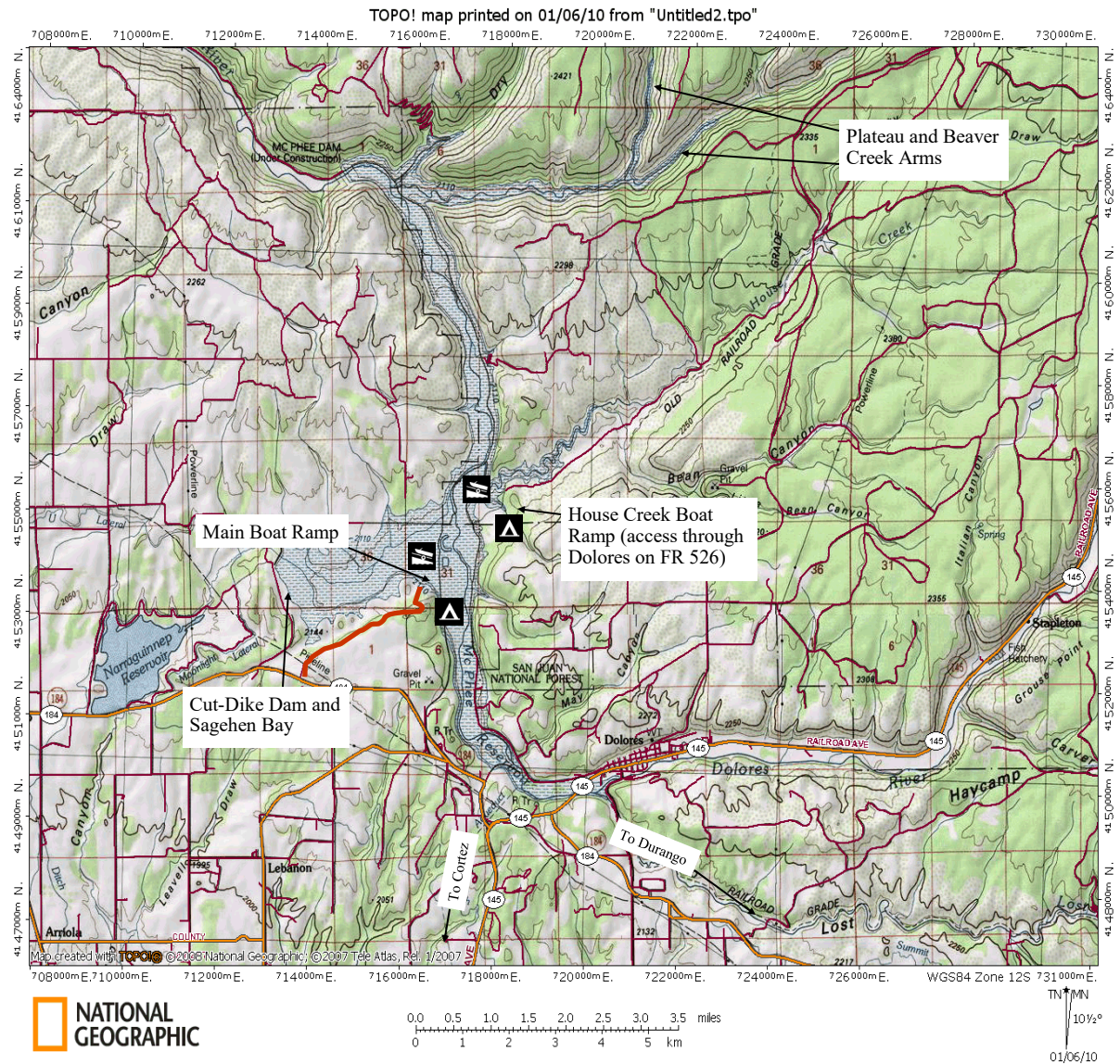
#### Crappie and Perch

- Both species will keep an angler occupied but the growth rate on these fish is low and few quality sized fish are typically caught.

#### Walleye

- There are large walleye in McPhee. These fish were illegally stocked and CPW does not actively manage these fish. There is no bag limit on Walleye. However, they are difficult to catch. Probably the best location and time to fish for walleye is in April near the rip-rap along the great cut-dike dam.

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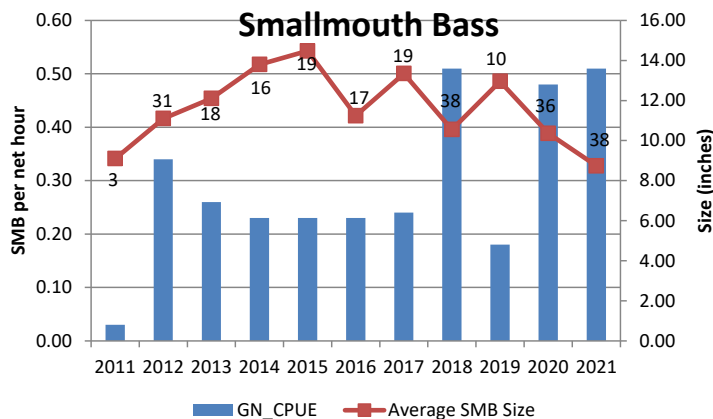
## FISH SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT DATA

### 2021 Gill Net Survey Results\*

Fish Species (sportfish listed in order of abundance)	# Caught	Average Length (Range) in inches	Average Weight in pounds
Smallmouth Bass	38	12.3" (8.7 - 17.3)	1.0
Kokanee Salmon	10	11" (5.3 - 12.8)	0.5
Rainbow Trout	6	11.6" (10 - 13.8)	0.6
Walleye**	38	11.8" (7.9 - 18.5)	0.6
Yellow Perch	11	7.8" (4.3 - 11.7)	0.2
White Sucker	90	13.8" (7.9 - 21.6)	1.4
Black Crappie	4	6" (4 - 11)	0.3
Carp	7	13.6" (8.8 - 23.2)	1.8

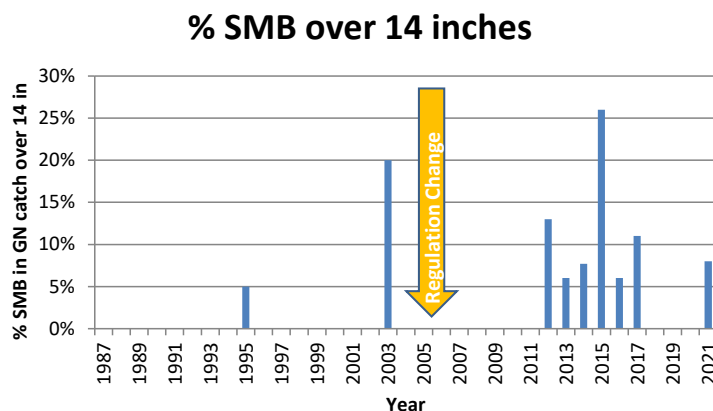
\*Gillnet surveys consist of setting four 150 foot nets overnight at the same location and time (1st week in June) each year. Table is the combined catch for 2019.

\*\*Walleye and carp were illegally introduced. Carp showed up in the reservoir in 2009. Walleye in 2007.



TOP LEFT GRAPH:

- Smallmouth Bass abundance (blue bars) relative to size (red line). Number of bass caught in the sample year are the numbers next to red squares).
- Smallmouth Bass abundance in gillnets varies from a low of 0.05 fish per gillnet hour in 2011 to over 0.5 fish per gillnet hour in 2021. About 40% of this variation is explained by lake elevation. Higher the lake the lower the catch (i.e. fish are more spread out at high lake levels and more concentrated at lower levels).
- Smallmouth Bass average size increases after extended periods of low lake levels (trend from 2012-2015). Vegetation that colonizes the open shore and flats of the lake during drought contribute nutrients to the fishery as they decay when the lake fills in wet years.



BOTTOM LEFT GRAPH:

- Smallmouth Bass regulation prohibiting the harvest of bass between 10 - 14 inches was designed to protect older spawning adults and increase harvest on fish below 10 inches spurring growth in the larger size classes with less competition from smaller fish.
- Regulation was put in place in 2005.
- Regulation and/or angler release rates appear to be working to increase the abundance of fish over 14 inches



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**Management Notes:** McPhee Reservoir is managed primarily as a warmwater mixed species lake. Primary sportfish management is directed toward a combination of warmwater and coldwater species: Rainbow Trout, Kokanee Salmon, Smallmouth Bass, Largemouth Bass, and Black Crappie. McPhee provides about 16,000 angler days per year, with an estimated total catch of about 24,000 fish. Rainbow Trout and Kokanee Salmon both comprise 37% of the catch, followed by Smallmouth Bass (19%), Yellow Perch (6%), and Largemouth Bass (1%). These estimates were derived from creel surveys done in 1988 and 1993. Few formal angler surveys are done by CPW these days due to cost. Fish species present (in decreasing order of relative abundance): Smallmouth Bass, Yellow Perch, Rainbow Trout, Kokanee Salmon, walleye, Largemouth Bass, Black Crappie, White Sucker, Flannemouth Sucker, Common Carp, Bluehead Sucker, Roundtail Chub, Green Sunfish, Channel Catfish, Black Bullhead, Brown Trout, and Cutthroat Trout, and Northern Pike. McPhee Reservoir is managed to provide quality to preferred size Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass (11 to 15-inch range). Smallmouth Bass are self-sustaining; no further stocking of smallmouth is needed. McPhee Reservoir has been managed as a Kokanee Salmon brood lake since 1994. The average annual kokanee egg take at the old Dolores Hatchery above McPhee from 1996 to 2021 is 599,148 eggs (~4-7% of Colorado's statewide need). The recent illicit introduction of fish species such as Walleye, Northern Pike, and Carp, may have a detrimental impact to other sportfishes through direct competition for food resources or outright predation (such as walleye and kokanee). Colorado relies on a number of "broodstock" lakes such as McPhee to supply the States stocking needs for Kokanee Salmon. Because kokanee populations are notoriously variable in nature a number of broodstock lakes have been started to hedge against Statewide shortages of eggs. Maintaining these broodstock lakes is becoming an increasingly difficult objective to satisfy as a number of illegally stocked fish keep showing up in Colorado's waters. As with many SW waters, there is a Fish Consumption Advisory warning anglers to limit their consumption of fish because some species may have higher concentrations of mercury than what the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment recommends. These fish include Walleye and Smallmouth Bass larger than 15 inches. Specific information is posted at the lake and at the CDPHE website.



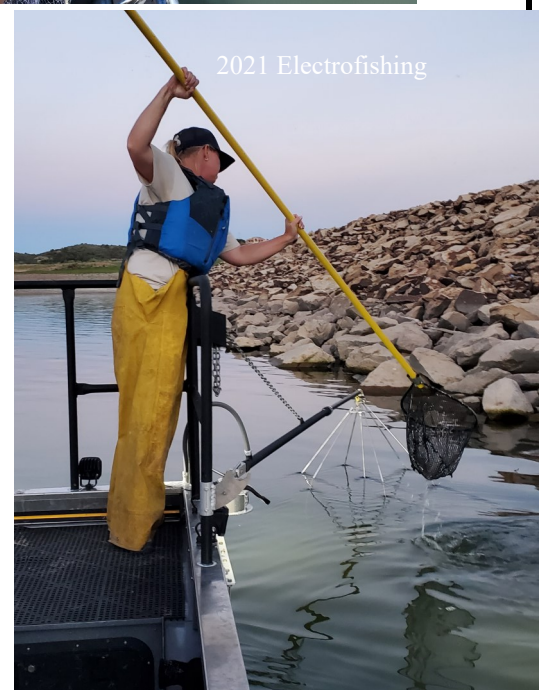
2021 Crappie



2021 Gillnetting (House Creek)



2021 Smallmouth Bass, Sagehen Bay



2021 Electrofishing