

COMMISSION ORDER 40: FISH MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

CALENDAR YEARS 2027 & 2028

1. Title of Proposed Change: Establish daily bag limits at East Mesa Community Park Pond

Proposed Regulation Change: Establish bag limits of: 2 catfish, 2 trout, 1 bass (minimum 13 inches), 5 sunfish (various species including bluegill, redear, and hybrid), and 1 white amur (grass carp) minimum size 30 inches.

Current Regulation Language: No current regulations exist, therefore statewide daily bag limits would apply. Daily bag limit of 10 catfish, 4 trout, 6 bass, unlimited sunfish, and 1 white amur (grass carp) minimum size 30 inches.

Justification: East Mesa Community Park Pond is a newly constructed water within a city park and is not a part of the CFP waters but is under consideration. The pond is expected to be open to the public in November or December 2026. The intent is to establish daily bag limits that are consistent with other water in Yuma of similar size such as the CFP waters. The pond was stocked in April 2026 with a ‘starter package’ consisting of largemouth bass, channel catfish, bluegill, and fathead minnow. Without establishing daily bag limits that are consistent with other CFP waters (more conservative than statewide limits), then statewide bag limits would automatically apply which allow far more harvest and would likely result in immediate overharvest of a newly established water. This would likely result in poor fishing until daily bag limits are reduced. As a new water, establishing daily bag limits early will eliminate the need for a change months or years after becoming established as a known fishing location.

Potential Benefits: The East Mesa Community Park Pond would be able to establish consistent regulations with other CFP waters that are similar in size near the estimated timeframe for opening the park to the general public. More conservative daily bag limits would decrease the need for more frequent stocking and therefore reduce associated impacts on the City of Yuma and the Department’s finances and time. Additionally, establishing CFP bag limits would increase anglers catch rates and avoid overharvest on a smaller waterbody.

Potential Drawbacks: None noted.

Signage Needs: CFP has signs available for the pond and two signs can be placed within the park immediately upon approval of this proposed regulation change.

Outreach Needs and Strategy: The public would be notified via various media types (press release, Fishing Report, Facebook Fish AZ) and the printed fishing regulation booklet for

2027-2028. In addition, the Department has a close relationship with the City of Yuma and would coordinate public releases on the proposed change.

Law Enforcement Coordination: There is strong support from Regional staff on this proposed change, including from the Regional Aquatic Wildlife Program Manager, as well as from the Regional Supervisor, Law Enforcement Program Manager, and South Sector Field Supervisor.

2. Title of Proposed Change: Amend the daily bag limits at Maricopa Lake in Youngtown

Proposed Regulation Change: Establish new limits of: 2 catfish, 2 trout, 1 bass (minimum 13 inches), 5 sunfish (various species including bluegill, redear, and hybrid), and 1 white amur (grass carp) minimum size 30 inches.

Current Regulation Language: Statewide daily bag limits currently apply. Daily bag limit of 10 catfish, 4 trout, 6 bass, unlimited sunfish, and 1 white amur (grass carp) minimum size 30 inches.

Justification: This is not a CFP water but is under consideration. This proposed change would establish daily bag limits that are consistent with other CFP ponds within the Phoenix metro and elsewhere, and would be more appropriate than statewide limits due to the pond's small size and the amount of angling pressure. The lake is open to the public, but is relatively unknown and is not currently stocked by the Department. The City of Youngtown has stocked the pond, but the current fish population in the pond is unknown. Statewide bag limits are far more liberal and would likely result in immediate overharvest under statewide regulations. This would likely result in poor fishing until daily bag limits are reduced and are consistent with other small water bodies like CFP waters. The City Manager of Youngtown (Brian Stutzman) and City Council are supportive of the proposed regulation change.

Potential Benefits: Maricopa Lake would have consistent regulations with other similar sized waters like the CFP waters. More conservative daily bag limits would decrease the need for more frequent stocking and therefore reduce associated impacts on the City of Maricopa and the Department's finances and time. Additionally, establishing CFP bag limits would increase anglers catch rates and avoid overharvest on a smaller waterbody.

Potential Drawbacks: Anglers have grown accustomed to the distinction between Lakes and Ponds in the fishing regulations. Lakes are typically larger in size and stocked more frequently than ponds, and therefore have a slightly higher daily bag limit for catfish, trout, bass, and sunfish. The existing name Maricopa Lake may confuse anglers thinking "Lake limits" would apply rather than "Pond Limits". Appropriate signage and outreach can help clarify the regulations to ensure compliance.

Signage Needs: CFP has signs available for the pond and two signs can be placed within the park immediately upon approval of this proposed regulation change.

Outreach Needs and Strategy: The public would be notified via various media types (press release, Fishing Report, Facebook Fish AZ) and the printed fishing regulation booklet for 2027-2028.

Law Enforcement Coordination: Regional Law enforcement staff were notified by the Aquatics Program Manager of the proposed new pond and associated bag limits and they are supportive of the regulation change.

3. Title of Proposed Change: Amend bass limits for Sahuarita Lake, Kennedy Lake, Silverbell Lake, and Lakeside Lake (Tucson area at 4 CFP waters)

Proposed Regulation Change: Catch-and-release for largemouth bass.

Current Regulation Language: Bass have a 2-fish limit, minimum 13 inches per day.

Justification: These waters (Sahuarita Lake, Kennedy Lake, Silverbell Lake, and Lakeside Lake) are all part of the CFP. Largemouth bass are one of the most sought after species in Arizona. According to the 2022 statewide angler survey, 60% of anglers surveyed targeted bass and creel surveys at the CFP waters show that the proportion of anglers fishing for bass has increased five-fold since 1995 (Table 1). Demand for bass fishing continues to grow, yet current catch rates in the Tucson-area CFP waters remain well below management targets of 0.50 fish/hour.

Table 1. Percentage of anglers targeting bass in CFP waters as measured during periodic creel surveys.

Year	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Percent CFP Anglers Targeting largemouth bass	3%	9%	13%	10%	14%	17%

To support this high angler interest, the Department annually stocks largemouth bass into CFP waters when water quality allows. Although bass are capable of natural reproduction in these systems, supplemental stocking is necessary to maintain fishable populations. Stocking numbers vary based on fish size and transport capacity, but the Department typically stocks 10,000–12,000 largemouth bass per year across CFP waters. From 2022–2026, 12,358 largemouth bass were stocked into Tucson-area waters, approximately 3,000 fish per lake. Largemouth bass are also the most expensive CFP species to stock, costing \$8 per fish for 6–8 inch individuals (7–10 fish per pound).

Angler participation in CFP waters has increased substantially, rising from 34,390 anglers in 1995 to 137,200 anglers in 2020. However, despite more anglers and a growing Tucson population, angler user days per acre have declined (Table 2). No new CFP waters have been

added in the Tucson-area for many years, suggesting that declining catch rates, not declining interest, are limiting angler use.

Table 2. Estimated angler user days per acre (AUD/ac) at the Tucson-area CFP waters (Silverbell, Kennedy, Lakeside, and Sahuarita) during creel surveys in 2010, 2015, and 2020.

Lake	2010 Angler User Days (AUD/ac)	2015 Angler User Days (AUD/ac)	2020 Angler User Days (AUD/ac)
Silverbell	9,100	5,279	4,924
Kennedy	9,200	4,510	4,515
Lakeside	5,500	3,085	2,964
Sahuarita	6,700	3,260	965
Total	30,500	16,134	13,368

Catch rates support this conclusion. In Tucson-area CFP waters, angler catch rates have exceeded the management target of 0.50 fish/hour only once in the past 15 years (Sahuarita Lake, 2010; Table 3). Since 2010, catch rates have declined at all four lakes. By 2020, catch rates ranged from 0.10 fish/hour (Silverbell) to 0.28 fish/hour (Sahuarita). This long-term downward trend aligns with the observed decline in angler user days per acre.

Table 3. Angler catch rates (fish/hour) for all fish at the Tucson-area CFP waters (Silverbell, Kennedy, Lakeside, and Sahuarita) during creel surveys in 2010, 2015, and 2020.

Lake	2010 Angler Catch Rates (fish/hour)	2015 Angler Catch Rates (fish/hour)	2020 Angler Catch Rates (fish/hour)
Silverbell	0.32	0.24	0.10
Kennedy	0.28	0.29	0.20
Lakeside	0.48	0.20	0.21
Sahuarita	0.51	0.45	0.28
Mean	0.40	0.30	0.20

Harvest pressure has also increased. Three of the four Tucson-area CFP waters show rising harvest rates, with Kennedy Lake reaching 57% harvest (Table 4). Mean harvest across Tucson CFP waters increased from 12.5% to 21.25%. Higher harvest rates likely compound low catch rates, especially in small urban lakes with limited habitat and high angling pressure.

Table 4. Percent of bass harvested (%) for all fish at the Tucson-area CFP waters (Silverbell, Kennedy, Lakeside, and Sahuarita) during creel surveys in 2015 and 2020.

Lake	2015 Percent of Bass Harvested (%)	2020 Percent of Bass Harvested (%)
Silverbell	0	8
Kennedy	0	57
Lakeside	0	7
Sahuarita	50	13
Mean	12.50	21.25

In addition to harvest, avian predation further reduces bass survival. To mitigate predation and improve angler success, the Department has installed fish habitat structures to provide cover and concentrate fish. While habitat improvements offer benefits, anglers continue to report poor catch rates and frequent harvest of stocked bass.

Given the high cost of stocking, increasing angler demand, and consistently low catch rates, a shift from a 2-bass harvest limit to catch-and-release is recommended. A catch-and-release regulation would:

- Increase survival of stocked bass
- Improve catch rates in heavily fished urban waters
- Protect the Department's investment in the most expensive CFP species, largemouth bass

This regulation change would be implemented as a trial, with a follow-up creel survey planned to start in 2028 to evaluate changes in catch rates, harvest, and angler satisfaction. If successful, the catch-and-release regulation could be expanded to additional CFP waters where low catch rates and harvest pressure are limiting angler success. CFP will not change its stocking and will continue to stock annually.

Potential Benefits: Bass survival rates could improve with immediate release resulting in an increased chance for another angler to catch a bass. This could increase angler success rates at catching a bass. Increased catch rates are often associated with an increase in angler satisfaction. Lastly, multiple anglers have requested this change and are in support of a bass catch and release regulation.

Potential Drawbacks: Anglers often use bait to fish for catfish and trout, so there is a good possibility for anglers to inadvertently deep-hook bass and cause mortality even though it is unintentional. There are a group of anglers that like to harvest bass at these lakes and would be against this proposed regulation. Another drawback is having a largemouth bass specific regulation at waters that have multiple species stocked (multiple regulations) resulting in more complicated regulations.

Signage Needs: The CFP signs would need to be changed at all the affected waters. There are approximately 23 signs that would be affected. Estimated cost to replace all affected signage is \$2,970 (from Mohave County Traffic Control).

Outreach Needs and Strategy: This proposed change would primarily be done through a combination of tactics involving:

- 1) Signs would be changed at the lakes. As soon as approved we would purchase the signs to try and get them in by January 1. If the regulations were to be implemented prior to sign creation, we would remove all regulation signs at the affected waters until new signs were available.
- 2) Published Game and Fish regulation booklet for 2027-2028.
- 3) We would initiate contact with some of the local clubs to inform them of the change.
- 4) We would post the changes in the Department's Fishing Report and post something on FishAZ.

Law Enforcement Coordination: Sector Supervisor and local LE WM's are supportive of a bass catch and release regulation. They would prefer new signage to be in place when the regulation change goes into effect, and they suggested considering a sunset date or removing the regulation if it is not effective.

4. Title of Proposed Change: Remove current special regulations at Lee Valley Lake and return it to statewide regulations to address a management need to improve fishing for the public

Proposed Regulation Change: Statewide Regulations for trout (includes Rainbow, Cutthroat, Brown, Brook, Tiger, Gila, and Apache trout; Grayling). Daily Limit is four fish in any combination with a possession limit of twice the daily limit.

Current Regulation Language: The limit is 2 trout (includes any combination of trout and grayling); artificial fly and lure only.

Justification: Lee Valley Lake is located at 9,418 feet in elevation on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. Lee Valley Lake dam was built on Lee Valley Creek in 1899. It is 35 surface acres with a maximum depth of 20 feet when full. The reservoir was originally built for irrigation, but was purchased by the Department in 1960 to improve fishing opportunities for the public. The Department is the exclusive water rights holder for the lake, so water levels can be maintained when adequate winter snowfall and monsoon moisture occur. Lee Valley Creek, which was formerly a recovery stream for Apache trout, naturally flows into the East Fork of the Little Colorado River (EFLCR). Rather uniquely, the spillway of Lee Valley Lake actually directs overflow to a completely different watershed, the West Fork of the Little Colorado River (WFLCR). Both EFLCR and WFLCR are designated recovery streams for Apache trout

currently. As a result, Lee Valley Lake finds itself at the heart of two current and one past Apache trout recovery streams and is managed accordingly with species of fish that are compatible with Apache trout recovery. Department stocking records indicate that brook trout were introduced in 1953, Arctic grayling in 1965 and Apache trout in 1968. Lee Valley Lake was historically known as a place that provided not only high angler catch rates, but also the chance to catch large fish, particularly for brook trout (when the Department still managed the species there), Apache trout, and Arctic grayling. In fact, Lee Valley Lake currently holds the state record for Arctic grayling at 1 lb 9.76 oz in weight and 14.65 inches in length.

In 1986, Lee Valley Lakes's management emphasis changed to focus entirely on opportunities for Apache trout and Arctic grayling to provide anglers the opportunity to catch fish species considered to be uncommon or to have unique or unusual qualities. The Department decided to move away from brook trout as a species in the lake due to the fact that they were relatively common statewide at that time and were deemed incompatible for Apache trout recovery efforts both at that time and in the future. Fishing regulations were also changed at the same time to reduce the bag limit to two trout and/or Arctic grayling per day and to only allow the use of artificial flies and lures in an effort to reduce harvest and allow for increased survival of stocked fish, improved average fish size, and increased angler catch rates.

Current management continues to emphasize opportunities for Apache trout and Arctic grayling utilizing the Featured Species concept under the Department's Coldwater Vision Document. The current species composition consists of Apache trout, Arctic grayling, and fathead minnow. Artificial fly and lure only, with a two trout daily bag limit regulations have remained in place since 1986. Approximately 750 to 5,000 hatchery Apache trout are stocked annually at a catchable size in the spring, and 800 to 6,300 Arctic grayling are stocked as available annually; however, it should be noted that Arctic grayling availability is uncertain from year to year and are sometimes unavailable from other state hatcheries and as a result they may not be stocked every year.

In recent years, the fishery at Lee Valley Lake has failed to meet management objectives for either the fish population itself or for angler satisfaction due to a multitude of factors. First, as an aging reservoir, Lee Valley Lake consistently has poor water quality in mid-late summer to early fall and during winter most years, which has led to periodic summer and winter kills. This is further exacerbated by the fact that water levels in Lee Valley Reservoir depend heavily on winter snowfall and the lake has consistently remained low since 2020 (Figure 1).

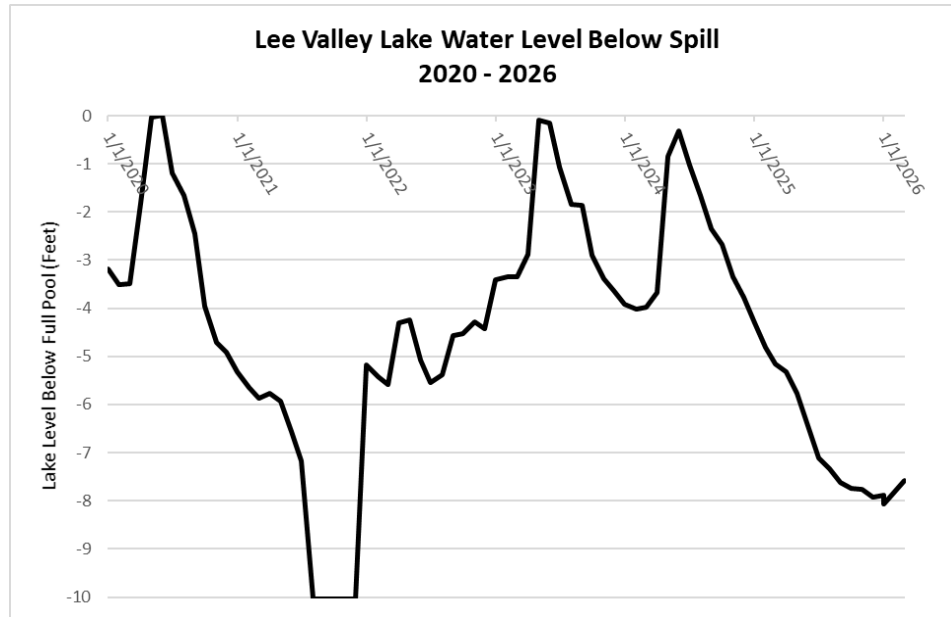


Figure 1. Water level of Lee Valley lake 2020 - 2026.

During the past six years of extreme drought, decreased water levels have caused water quality to further degrade over historic conditions with periods of high pH during summer and low oxygen levels under the ice during winter months persisting for longer than ever. These poor conditions have led to both the Department not being able to stock consistent numbers of fish each year (Table 1) and to low survival rates for stocked Apache trout and Arctic grayling as measured by standardized gill net survey even when the lake has been stocked (Table 2).

Table 1. Stocking numbers in Lee Valley Lake from 2016 to 2026.

Year	Apache Trout	Arctic Grayling
2016	Not Available	Not Available
2017	Not Available	Not Available
2018	0	506
2019	4,000	6,382
2020	0	4,011
2021	1,490	4,003
2023	6,733	Not Available
2024	1,491	0
2025	1,503	Not Available
2026	0	2,017

Table 2. Survey results from standardized short-set gill net surveys of Lee Valley Lake from 2016 - 2025.

Year	Species	Total Number of Fish Caught	Size Class
2025	Apache Trout	1	14-15 (100.0)
	Arctic Grayling	2	12-13 (50.0) 13-14 (50.0)
2020 (3 Surveys)	Apache Trout	0	
	Arctic Grayling	3	9-10 (66.6); 10-11 (33.3)
2019 (4 Surveys)	Apache Trout	2	13-14 (50.0); 15-16 (50.0)
	Arctic Grayling	56	8-9 (51.8); 9-10 (48.2)
2018	Apache Trout	0	
	Arctic Grayling	0	
2017	Apache Trout	0	
	Arctic Grayling	2	13-14 (100.0)
2016	Apache Trout	0	
	Arctic Grayling	25	9-10 (28.0); 10-11 (16.0); 11-12 (24.0); 12-13 (32.0)

In addition, a recent creel (angler) survey that was completed between May and October of 2025 highlighted the impact of poor water quality and poor fishing for the past decade. Overall, it appears that poor fishing has caused members of the angling public to simply stop coming to Lee Valley Lake. During the last creel conducted by the Department in 1998 anglers fishing Lee Valley Lake expended a total of 12,436 hours of fishing effort. The total anglers catch was 20,136 fish at the rate of 1.50 fish per hour and catch rates remained high throughout the year. During this past survey in 2025, only four anglers were interviewed over the course of fifteen, half-day surveys resulting in an estimated angler effort for the lake of 326 ± 128 hours for shore anglers and 70 ± 70 hours for boat anglers. Furthermore, none of the four anglers interviewed during the survey caught a fish during their time fishing Lee Valley. While the water level of Lee Valley was certainly impacted by the recent drought, the lake was stocked with the normal allocation of 1,500 Apache trout and the lake was listed on the stocking schedule; even given these facts, the angler public has come to recognize that fishing is poor at Lee Valley Lake and the lake is generally avoided at this time. Though not official surveys, anecdotal observations by Department staff during visits to Lee Valley over the past six years to record water quality at the lake or to check on fish kill reports from the public have noticed the same trend, anglers are just not fishing Lee Valley anymore.

Given all of the above, Department staff are proposing a shift in the fishing regulations for Lee Valley Lake that will focus on increasing opportunities and simplifying regulations in the area for all of the angling public by removing the current special regulations and reverting back to statewide regulations. While a change of fishing regulations is proposed, the overall fisheries

management strategy will remain unchanged and will focus on the stocked Apache trout and Arctic grayling to create fishing opportunities due to the fact that they are compatible with native species in WFLCR and EFLCR. Department staff are hopeful that allowing the public to utilize all methods of fishing (particularly bait fishing) could increase catch rates when water quality is good and when fish are recently stocked due to the fact that stocked Apache trout tend to be highly vulnerable to both live (e.g. worms and mealworms) and artificial bait (e.g. powerbait) when first stocked. In addition, when water conditions levels and water quality are good, Apache trout available from Department Hatcheries is more consistent and numerous than ever, Department staff also plan to stock increased numbers of catchable-sized Apache trout as another method to increase angler catch rates and satisfaction.

Potential Benefits: The regulation change will be returning Lee Valley Lake to the statewide daily bag limit would further simplify the fishing regulations for anglers and would likely lead to increased compliance and satisfaction. The change could improve fishing by allowing bait to be used. Additionally the regulation change will allow the public to harvest more Apache trout or Arctic grayling when fishing is good to better utilize stocked fish. Based on the data, the current regulations do not meet the intent in which they were established.

Potential Drawbacks: The regulation change will move away from special regulations and could be viewed by a segment of the angling community as a loss of opportunity to catch large fish. The change may decrease the opportunity for fish to grow as large due to the fact that harvest will likely increase.

Signage Needs: Two signs will be needed for this water to replace existing signage.

Outreach Needs and Strategy: Outreach for this potential change will largely take place on social media, over the phone when Department staff are having conversations with anglers, or in person when Department staff encounter anglers. In addition, this change will be displayed on the Department's Fish and Boat AZ interactive map

Law Enforcement Coordination: This potential change has been internally reviewed by the Region I Regional Supervisor and East Sector law enforcement staff and is supported by all individuals due to the fact that it simplifies regulations in the area and could improve fishing at the lake.

5. Title of Proposed Change: Remove current special regulations at Lee Valley Creek and return it to statewide regulations to match proposed regulations for Lee Valley Lake

Proposed Regulation Change: Statewide Regulations for trout (includes rainbow, cutthroat, brown, brook, tiger, Gila, and Apache trout; grayling). Daily Limit is four fish in any combination with a possession limit of twice the daily limit.

Current Regulation Language: The limit is 2 trout (includes any combination of trout and grayling); artificial fly and lure only.

Justification: Lee Valley Creek is a tributary of the East Fork of the Little Colorado River (EFLCR). Lee Valley Creek was considered an Apache trout recovery stream until recently; however, all previous efforts to establish a recovery population of Apache trout in Lee Valley Creek failed and the stream itself is small and provides only marginal habitat for Apache trout. As a result, the stream is no longer considered as a candidate for Apache trout recovery.

Lee Valley Creek was opened to angling in 2021 to provide an opportunity for anglers to catch any stocked Apache trout or Arctic grayling that moved into the creek from Lee Valley Reservoir. Regulations at that time were changed to match the special regulations in place at Lee Valley Lake to simplify regulations in the area.

However, during this same regulation cycle, Department staff are proposing to change the current regulation for Lee Valley Lake from “limit is 2 trout (includes any combination of trout and grayling); artificial fly and lure only” back to statewide regulations as a method to improve fishing for the public and to simplify regulations in the area. If this change is approved by the Commission, then Department staff also propose to once again change regulations at Lee Valley Creek to match Lee Valley Lake.

Potential Benefits: Matches regulations with Lee Valley Lake if the proposed change there is approved by the Commission.

Potential Drawbacks: None identified.

Signage Needs: One sign will be needed for this water to replace existing signage.

Outreach Needs and Strategy: Outreach for this potential change will largely take place on social media, over the phone when Department staff are having conversations with anglers, a press release announcing regulation changes, in the monthly fishing report, or in person when Department staff encounter anglers. In addition, this change will be displayed on the Department’s Fish and Boat AZ interactive map

Law Enforcement Coordination: This potential change has been internally reviewed by the Region I Regional Supervisor and East Sector law enforcement staff and is supported by all individuals due to the fact that it simplifies regulations in the area and could improve fishing at the lake.

6. Title of Proposed Change: Increasing Spearfishing Opportunities at Lake Powell

Proposed Regulation Change: The limit is 20 for smallmouth bass and 5 for largemouth bass; unlimited for striped bass; unlimited for walleye; the limit is 10 crappie. Carp may be taken by

spearfishing and bow and arrow during daylight hours. Striped bass and smallmouth bass may also be taken by spearfishing during daylight hours. Largemouth bass may be taken by spearfishing during daylight hours seasonally (prohibited from April 1 through the fourth Saturday in June).

Current Regulation Language: The limit is 20 for smallmouth bass and 5 for largemouth bass; unlimited for striped bass; unlimited for walleye; the limit is 10 crappie. Carp may be taken by spearfishing and bow and arrow during daylight hours. Striped bass may also be taken by spearfishing during daylight hours.

Justification: For several years, angler groups and individuals in Arizona have asked to expand spearfishing opportunities to include more species of sportfish where applicable. Lake Powell provides such an opportunity to expand opportunities for two additional sportfish, largemouth and smallmouth bass. The proposed language reflects the regulation change being proposed by Utah Department of Natural Resources (UDWR) for Lake Powell and will ensure consistency with UDWR. The current Utah regulations for spearfishing in Lake Powell have included seasonal opportunities for largemouth and smallmouth bass for many years, while the Department has only allowed spearfishing for carp and striped bass. This year, Utah is proposing to eliminate the seasonality of take for smallmouth bass in order to increase harvest for this species and improve smallmouth bass growth.

UDWR Supporting Angler and Biological Data

Previous reports could not detect statistically significant trends in smallmouth bass numbers due to the extreme variability in bass catch rates over the years (1981-2025). However, relative weight (Wr) has been historically used to evaluate the condition of Lake Powell smallmouth bass (Figure 1). Relative weight compares the fish's actual weight to the expected weight based on the fish's length using a standard equation for the species expected length weight ratios. Condition has been stable with a mean Wr of 82 over the previous 25 years. Relative weights above 90 are considered healthy; whereas, under 90 is considered unhealthy with lower than expected fish weights. Often when a population has low relative weights there are too many individuals in the population which is stunting their growth.

Additionally, UDWR creel data suggests the majority of smallmouth bass harvest occurs by traditional anglers in April and May during the spawn, yet smallmouth bass are still over abundant. Anglers have been encouraged to harvest smallmouth bass to help and improve the size structure; however in 2025, only 11% of smallmouth bass catch were harvested through the creel season (Table 1). Improving the size structure of smallmouth bass in Lake Powell remains a priority for UDWR and the Department. The success of previous efforts in increasing harvest along with increasing the bag limit from 6 to 20 fish corresponded to a marked increase in size structure of the population. Replicating this effort, to once again increase harvest is needed to maintain the quality fishery that Lake Powell anglers have grown accustomed to. Efforts to

increase harvest will need to be implemented with a goal of achieving a 30% harvest rate, an increase of 19% harvest from the 2025 creel data. Increased harvest by spearfishing of smallmouth bass could enhance harvest of this species in order to reach management goals and a healthier population.

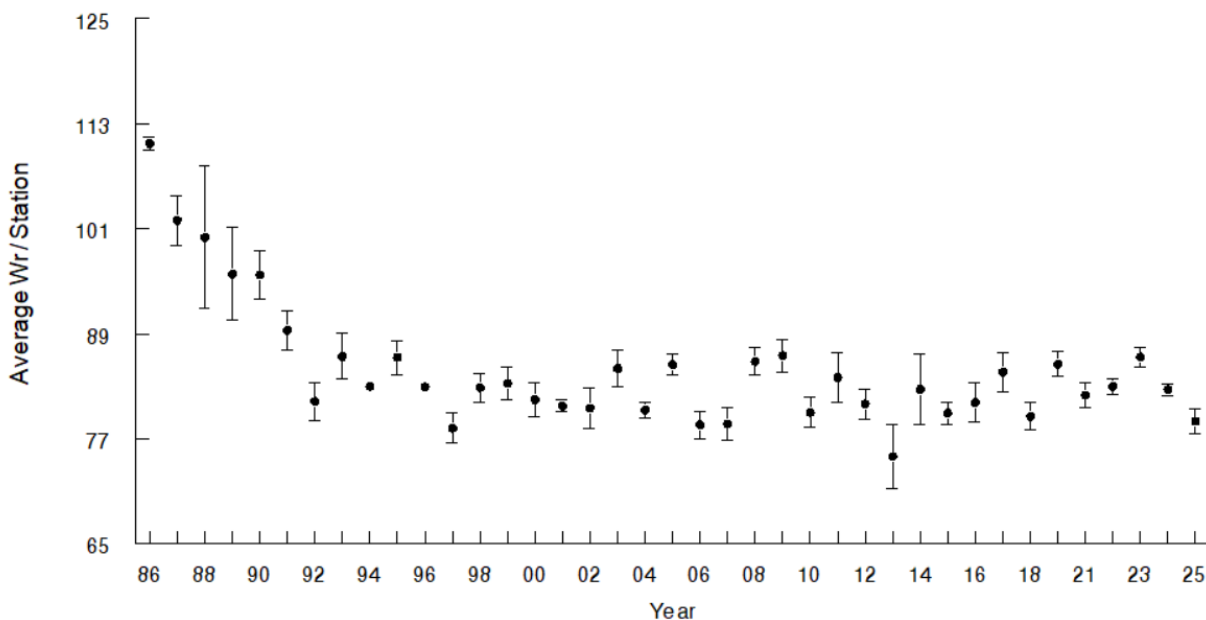


Figure 1. Average relative weight (Wr) of smallmouth bass (Total Length>149mm) per station from the fall gill net survey with standard error (SE), 1986-2025.

Table 1. Percent harvest of smallmouth bass by area and month, estimated from the 2018 angler survey at Lake Powell.

2018	Area	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Wt/Avg.
	Down-lake	18	20	22	5	15	16	24	18
	Up-lake	2	9	5	7	29	6	17	11
	Wt/Avg.	11	17	14	6	23	12	22	15

2025	Area	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Wt/Avg.
	Down-lake	15	16	3	6	54	9	7	12
	Up-lake	4	9	2	26	72	3	20	11
	Wt/Avg.	10	12	3	12	64	4	15	11

Potential Benefits: This change in regulations will provide expanded opportunities to spearfishing in the state of Arizona. The increased harvest rate of smallmouth bass because of

this regulation change could serve to produce a healthier population to meet UDWR management objectives. The Department supports the management objectives of UDWR. The change simplifies both the interpretation and enforcement of fishing regulations on Lake Powell. Additionally the change in regulations remove potential angler confusion by standardizing regulations across jurisdictional boundaries.

Potential Drawbacks: The public may have concerns about the potential harvest of smallmouth bass on spawning beds. However, the reduction of the population of smallmouth bass in Lake Powell is necessary based on the scientific data and this is one of the tools available to accomplish this reduction.

Signage Needs: No change in signage is necessary. Signs do not currently post spearfishing specific regulations and the creel limits by species are the same for those species legally harvested by spearfishing as angling.

Outreach Needs and Strategy: The public would be notified via various media types (press release, Fishing Report, Facebook Fish AZ) and the printed fishing regulation booklet for 2027-2028.

Law Enforcement Coordination: The Department has had numerous conversations with UDWR and they are excited to take one step closer to identical regulations on the Arizona and Utah sides of Lake Powell. Wildlife Managers (Sector 7, Region II) thought that the changed regulations could be helpful.

7. Title of Proposed Change: Catch and Release Only for largemouth bass at Cluff Ranch Pond 3.

Proposed Regulation Change: Catch and release only for largemouth bass from January 1, 2027 through December 31, 2028. Thereafter, a statewide daily bag and possession limit would apply. Statewide daily bag and possession limits apply for all other species (except a four catfish in any combination daily bag limit special regulation).

Current Regulation Language: Statewide daily bag and possession limits apply for all other species (except a four catfish in any combination daily bag limit special regulation).

Justification: Cluff Ranch Pond 3 was drained in January 2021 to replace a dam valve and the entire fish population was lost. The valve has since been replaced and fish stockings have begun again. In May of 2026, a fish kill occurred and several fish species were lost before the largemouth bass had a chance to reproduce and recruit into the population. This regulation would aid in creating a self-sustaining largemouth bass population by restricting angler harvest and allowing the remaining and potential future stocked fish time to grow, reproduce, and recruit into the fishery. The regulation will be returned to statewide regulations on January 1, 2029.

Potential Benefits: The catch and release regulation will allow the largemouth bass to establish a self-sustaining population before being harvested. If allowed adequate time to establish, the largemouth bass will be able to reproduce and recruit in the pond and additional stockings would not be necessary.

Potential Drawbacks: Anglers will not be able to harvest largemouth bass until the population has become self-sustaining.

Signage Needs: A new sign will be purchased and installed reflecting the regulation change. Because of the single entrance to the pond, only one sign will need to be purchased.

Outreach Needs and Strategy: The community has been involved and aware of the restocking of the pond following the draining and dam valve replacement. We will continue to communicate with them through social media, phone and email communications, and Department personnel in the area.

Law Enforcement Coordination: The Sector Supervisor is supportive of this proposal.