

Lake Nockamixon: Warmwater Gem

by Ron Steffe

Nockamixon.

The word, from the Lenni Lenape language, means “at the place of soft soil.” To Pennsylvania anglers, this 1,450-acre lake, located in northern Bucks County, may just as well translate to “the lake with great fishing.”

For more information on Nockamixon State Park, visit www.dcnr.state.pa.us. On the left side of the main page, click on “State Parks” and follow the menus to Nockamixon. For more information on Big Bass regulations, visit the Commission’s web site, www.fish.state.pa.us. On the main page’s left side, click on “Laws & Regulations,” and then navigate on the left to “Big Bass Regulations.”

Centrally located in 5,283-acre Nockamixon State Park, Lake Nockamixon is surrounded by large areas of field and forest. In the heavily populated southeast corner of Pennsylvania, this green expanse with its productive warmwater fishery is welcome for those weary of congested city life.

There are many varieties of fish in Lake Nockamixon, but the six most popular species are channel catfish, largemouth bass, hybrid striped bass, chain pickerel, tiger muskellunge and walleyes.

Commission Area 6 Fisheries Biologist Dave Miko is most familiar with Lake Nockamixon’s fish. “Nockamixon is a lake that offers year-round fishing opportunities,” Miko says. “It is also a lake where the most popular fish are those that can grow to a large size.”

Largemouth bass

Lake Nockamixon has been under the Fish & Boat Commission’s Big Bass regulations since 1992. Historically this lake has been a bass lake with a naturally occurring largemouth bass population. “The Big Bass regulations have only helped the lake become an excellent place to find and catch big largemouths,” Miko says.

Smallmouth bass also provide summer action, even though their numbers aren’t as great as largemouth bass.

Pickerel, muskies

Of course, the other fish in Nockamixon are just what might per-

suade an angler to try these waters. The pickerel fishing is top notch. It is not uncommon to catch these members of the pike family that have grown to 25 inches and 5 pounds. Miko says that pickerel can be caught anytime, but ice anglers really enjoy more success at targeting the larger ones.

Both purebred muskellunge and tiger muskies have been stocked in Nockamixon. “The tiger musky population is good. We continue to stock them nearly every year and I would recommend any angler targeting these trophy fish to try Nockamixon,” Miko says. “But the purebred muskellunge have not become established.”

Walleyes

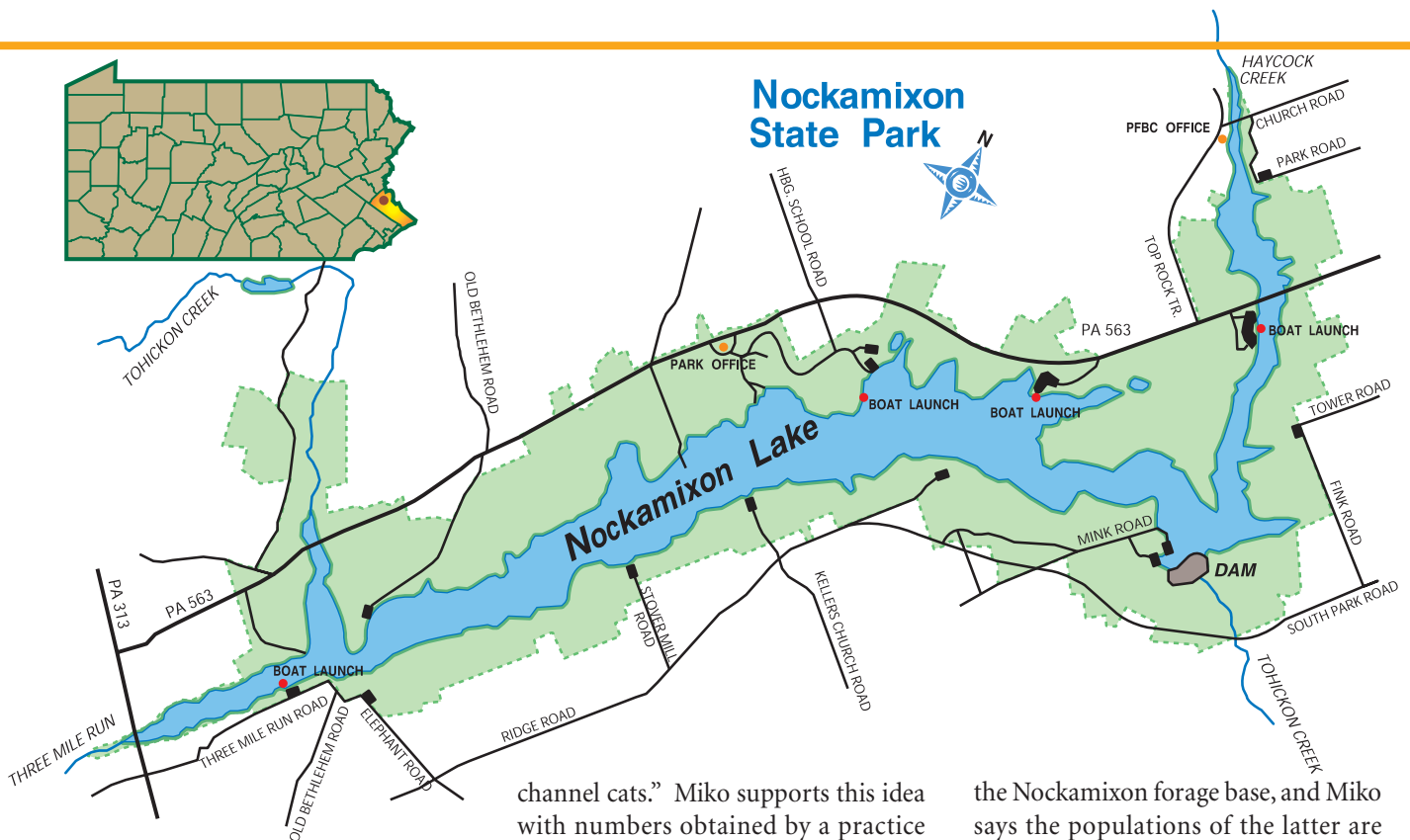
Large walleyes roam Nockamixon and Miko has some praise for them. “There is a good population of large walleyes. We stock fingerlings every year, but they experience heavy predation by largemouth bass. This in turn means we see a low number of back-up walleyes in the mid-size range, but the constant stocking means that there should still be an ample number reaching a large size.”

Stripers

Hybrid stripers are also stocked mainly annually, or at least when the Commission can get its hands on them.



photo-Ron Steffe; map graphics-Ted Walke



“Striped bass hybrids are in high demand nationwide,” Miko says. “We trade with other states to get them. With so many states in competition, there are years the Commission cannot fill the statewide demand, so we get fewer or even none.” As a result of this dilemma, and because of concerns about hybrids escaping into the Delaware River and estuary, in 1997 the Commission began annual stockings of the more readily available purebred stripers. Future surveys will determine just how successful these stockings are, but Miko adds that purebred stripers up to 38 inches long have been caught. Area 6 biologists would more than welcome seeing photos of purebred stripers caught in Nockamixon.

Catfish

The channel catfish fishery at Lake Nockamixon seems to make Miko a bit boastful. “Come spring, even though all the other fish species in the lake are becoming quite active, the channel cats may top the list,” he says. “They enter many coves in preparation for spawning, and directly after heavy rains, the areas near the feeder streams, with their high water, are great places to catch big

channel cats.” Miko supports this idea with numbers obtained by a practice known as trap-netting. Although you cannot compare the numbers of trap-netting with those of electrofishing, you can compare trap-netting numbers at Nockamixon with other southeastern Pennsylvania lakes to obtain figures on overall fish density.

In 2002, 4.4 channel catfish per hour of netting were recorded at Nockamixon. The southeast average was 1.5 catfish per hour. Fish over 20 inches long were .3 fish per hour of netting compared to .04 fish per hour in other southeast lakes. “These high numbers show that Nockamixon has a large population of channel catfish,” Miko says.

Panfish

He sums up the panfish action at Nockamixon in a short sentence: “High numbers of fish, few big ones.” Miko adds, “Bluegills have a small population of quality fish. We stocked black crappies to bolster those populations in 2001 and 2002, and we’re waiting to see how those stockings help. Yellow perch? Nothing typical of other lakes in the area in numbers.”

Along with stunted panfish and crayfish, alewives and gizzard shad make up

the Nockamixon forage base, and Miko says the populations of the latter are strong. It’s also why he suggests anglers use imitations of these forage fish and the live minnows themselves when fishing this lake.

Lake Nockamixon has a fishing pier at the lake’s midpoint. It has a large land expanse for shoreline fishing and four public launching areas open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It has docking space (high demand) and in-season boat rentals for canoes, rowboats, sailboats, paddle boats, pontoon boats and motorboats.

Note that Nockamixon has a 20hp motor limit, a recent change.

Like so many of our state parks, Nockamixon offers a large variety of outdoor recreation and enjoyment. But if you come exclusively for the fishing, take Miko’s advice: “Year-round this warmwater fishery can offer outstanding action for large fish. Whether through the ice, spring high water, summer heat or the change of season that fall brings, fishing here is good. And even if you hit a bad day when nothing seems to bite, you can save an outing by fishing the large population of brown bullheads here. They always bite.”

That’s just another reason to give Nockamixon a try. ☐