Perch Lake is a 23-acre drainage lake surrounded entirely by Rusk County Forest land in the Blue Hills region of Rusk County. Maximum depth is 40 feet, and the water is moderately clear (Secchi depth=5 feet). The substrate is 95% muck, and the remainder is sand, gravel, and rock. Shoreland vegetation is mainly hardwoods and conifers with smaller areas of bog and swamp. An intermittent stream drains from Audie Lake into the west side of Perch Lake, and an outlet on the east shore is the first order headwaters of Big Weirgor Creek. There is no private development, but Rusk County maintains a boat landing, campground, and picnic area on the south shore. On June 3, 2019, with water temperature at 66°F, we dip-netted all fish species in a complete shoreline circuit (0.85 mile) in 0.38 hour. Lake level was a half foot higher than normal, and low conductivity reduced our electrofishing capture efficiency.

**Largemouth Bass**

We captured 13 largemouth bass that ranged 6.5 – 16.0” and averaged 12.3” long. Electrofishing catch rates of 14 bass ≥ 8” per mile or 32 per hour indicated moderate to low population abundance that had decreased somewhat since 2008 when late spring electrofishing captured 24 bass/mile or 53/hour. Among bass 8” and longer in our small sample, two-thirds were ≥ 12”, 42% were legal-size bass ≥ 14”, and a third were at least 15” long. With fewer bass, the population’s size structure size improved since 2008 when 14% of bass ≥ 8” were legal-size fish and 10% were 15” or longer. Largemouth bass obviously do not eat enough bluegill, perch, and crappie to control their abundance and keep them growing fast for good fishing.

**Bluegill**

Late spring 2019 electrofishing captured 149 bluegills at electrofishing capture rates of 138 fish ≥ 3” per mile and 308 per hour. Those capture rates usually reflect moderate population abundance. But, even with a slight decrease since 2008, bluegill numbers in Perch Lake were still too high to offer good fishing. Bluegill size structure was disappointing, and few anglers would be happy with their prospects for catching a meal. Bluegills ranged 1.5 – 7.6” and averaged 4.3” long. Only 2% of bluegills ≥ 3” in our sample were keeper-size fish at least 7”, and none attained 8”. By comparison, 10% of bluegills ≥ 3” were keeper size in late spring 2008. The precipitous decline in the 2019 size distribution suggests that anglers may be taking nearly all of the slow-growing bluegills that live long enough to reach 7”.
Our sample also included 11 black crappies 6.5 – 7.7" and 27 yellow perch 2.1 – 6.6”. Though late spring electrofishing samples do not represent their population status, it is unlikely that Perch Lake’s crappie and perch populations offer meaningful angling opportunity. Like in 2008, minnows and northern pike were absent in our 2019 sample.

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