The WDNR surveyed Lake Onalaska, located in Pool 7 of the Mississippi River in the fall of 2012 using electro fishing equipment to determine the health of the fishery. A total of 1460 fish were collected with 35 species represented. Largemouth bass was the most abundant followed by bluegill, gizzard shad and yellow perch.

Similar sampling was done in 2008. Since 2008, average bluegill and black crappie sizes increased (0.3 & 0.6 inches, respectively). Largemouth bass and yellow perch were the same. Compared to other 29 other Mississippi River surveys from pool 11 through 4, Lake Onalaska bluegill were smaller than 28 other surveys and largemouth bass were smaller than 17. Black crappie and yellow perch were about the same size as the majority of other surveys. The proportion of “quality” (> 7 inches) and “preferred” (>8 inches) sized bluegill were below the WDNR recommendation while black crappie were at or above.

Lake Onalaska bluegill abundance was lower than six of the eight Mississippi River surveys similarly sampled in 2011 and 2012. Largemouth bass was lower than seven of the eight surveys. Yellow perch abundance was lower than three other surveys and the same as five. Abundance of all game fish (22 per hour), grouped as a whole, was lower in Lake Onalaska in 2012 than all eight other Mississippi River surveys (about 124 per hour).

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Compared to other recent Mississippi River surveys, Lake Onalaska has a relatively mediocre to low abundance of game fish, and has bluegill and largemouth bass that are relatively small. Size of black crappie and yellow perch are normal for the Mississippi River. Reproduction of game fishes appears to be strong. We did not compare Lake Onalaska’s fisheries resource to other non-Mississippi River surveys, but, by reputation the lake has an above average fishery.