



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## Department of Wildlife Resources

David L. Bulova  
Secretary of Natural  
and Historic Resources

Ryan J. Brown  
Executive Director

27-March-2026

Mr. Christian Goodwin  
County Administrator  
Louisa County  
1 Woolfolk Avenue  
Louisa, VA 23093

Dear Mr. Goodwin:

I would like to update you on our recent fisheries management activities for Lake Gordonsville (a.k.a Bowlers Mill). The fish community of the lake was surveyed by DWR in 2025; ten different species of fish were collected during the surveys. All species of fish collected were common to central Virginia and expected in the reservoir. The most popular fish for anglers at the reservoir is Largemouth Bass and results from this survey indicate that the bass population is exhibiting a downward trend in numbers since 2013. Additionally, it appears that smaller bass (9 to 13 inches) are exhibiting slow growth and stockpiling in this size range. The issues with the bass population are likely a function of excessive vegetation growth in the reservoir which limit bass feed ability and reduces lake productivity available for bass food resources. The lake contains a substantial amount of Watershield lily pads that grow throughout the summer. These plants use nutrients that could go into food production (planktonic algae) for fish. A quick visual estimate indicated that up to 30 acres of the lake has some form of vegetation growth during the warmer months. The vegetative cover is around 40%, which is well above the 30% threshold that is desired for fisheries production and recreational uses. Even with the bass feeding issues, the lake still contains some larger bass with bass up to 24 inches collected in the surveys.

The reservoir contains numerous species of panfish including Bluegill, Redear, and Black Crappie. The populations for these species were marginal with lower than desired catch rates and populations dominated by individuals smaller than the preferred size of anglers. The low catches and small sizes of panfish were likely caused by the same vegetation issues stated above.

DWR stocks Channel Catfish annually, but few were observed in our survey. This is not uncommon because our sampling gears are not effective for collecting catfish. Statewide fishing surveys and angler reports indicate that the stocked Channel Catfish fisheries are successful in small impoundments and very popular with Virginia anglers. Unfortunately, DWR is suspending the stocked Channel Catfish program for 2026 due to budgetary issues. We are hopeful to resolve the issue and continue the program soon. If facility owners and/or cooperators want to temporarily continue the popular program by providing funding during DWR's suspension, we approve and will be happy to help facilitate finding fish vendors and coordinate stockings.

Mr. Christian Goodwin  
March 27, 2026  
Page 2

Based on the surveys, I would suggest creating a vegetation management plan and pursuant actions to reduce vegetation growth for the benefit of the fisheries and recreational boaters. The management plan should include an adaptive and integrated approach to reduce Watershield in shallow areas and encourage more beneficial vegetation like Water Willow, Pickerelweed, Soft Rush, and/or Arrowhead. The plan should not aim to eradicate all aquatic vegetation, since some vegetation is beneficial for fish populations, but should focus on reducing amounts below the 30% threshold. A vegetation management plan and program are big efforts and may not be an immediate priority for Louisa County due to funding and manpower. I recommend considering the project in the future for the potential benefits to the resources and recreational visitors. Let me know if I can be of assistance in any way with this matter.

On our 2025 visits, I noticed a lack of a lake regulation signage that includes fishing size and creel limits. I would recommend adding some signage at the boat landing that includes that information or references to our website for anglers to visit for the regulations. Let me know if I can be of service to help or if you need a copy of our agency logo. The current fishing regulations pertaining to the lake include:

Fishing license is required to fish for anyone 16 and older,  
Largemouth Bass: 5 per day, no minimum length limit,  
Bluegill (Bream) and other Sunfish: 50 per day in the aggregate (combined), no minimum length limit,  
Crappie (Black and White): 25 per day in the aggregate (combined), no minimum length limit,  
Channel Catfish: 5 per day, 18-inch minimum length limit.

I am attaching our 2026 fishing report for Lake Gordonsville for your viewing. The report includes more detailed findings from our surveys and what anglers can expect to catch from the reservoir. Please contact me if you have questions or want to discuss the findings and recommendations. I can be reached by email or phone at (804) 305-8940. Thank you for all your cooperation and I look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

*Johnathan Harris*

Johnathan Harris  
Fisheries Biologist

Enclosure

Cc: Steve Reeser – Regional Fisheries Manager, VDWR  
Pam Baughman – General Manager, Louisa County Water Authority



**Lake Gordonsville  
(Bowler's Mill)  
2026**



**NOTE TO ANGLERS: THE CHANNEL CATFISH STOCKING PROGRAM HAS BEEN POSTPONED DUE TO FUNDING LIMITATIONS. NO CHANNEL CATFISH STOCKINGS AT THE LAKE ARE PLANNED FOR 2026 AND ANGLERS MAY EXPERIENCE DECREASE CATFISH CATCHES IN FUTURE YEARS. WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT THE FUNDING ISSUES WILL BE RESOLVED, THE PROGRAM CAN BE RESTORED, AND THAT THIS WILL BE A TEMPORARY INCONVENIENCE FOR CATFISH ANGLERS.**

Lake Gordonsville, also known as Bowler's Mill Lake, is a 75-acre lake that was constructed in 1970 as a water supply source for the Town of Gordonsville. The Louisa County Parks and Recreation Department administers the lake, which currently contains self-sustaining populations of Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Redear Sunfish, Black Crappie, and Chain Pickerel. To provide additional angling opportunities, the reservoir is annually stocked with Channel Catfish. In the spring of 2025, the fish community of Lake Gordonsville was sampled by boat electrofishing and trapnets. This report summarizes the results of these surveys and what anglers can expect to catch in Lake Gordonsville.

Lake Gordonsville contains a typical fish community for a small impoundment with a combined total of ten fish species collected (Table 1). Largemouth Bass, Redear, and Bluegill were the most abundant species collected in the electrofishing survey, while Bluegill and Black Crappie were the most common in the trapnet survey (Table 1). The Largemouth Bass catch rate was 59 fish/hour which is lower than observed in previous surveys and continues a downward trend in abundance since 2013 (Figure 1). The decrease in numbers is likely due to decreased recruitment of young bass to the adult population. The lake has an overabundance of aquatic vegetation (primarily Watershield lily pads) especially in the shallow area. Although vegetation is beneficial for bass, excess can cause issues like reduction in bass spawning habitat, difficulty for bass to find prey, and nutrient reductions which limit beneficial algae growth for fish. The Watershield growth has gotten severe since 2013 and is likely limiting what the lake can produce due to the above-mentioned dynamics.

The lake contains acceptable numbers of bass in the 9-to-15-inch range but was low in numbers of fish in the 15-to-24-inch range (Figure 2). There is still trophy bass potential in the lake as exhibited by the collection of a bass that measured 24 ½ inches and weighed approximately 9.5 pounds. It appears that smaller bass (9-15 inches) are having issues obtaining food resources with the average condition of bass collected in the 8-to-15-inch range being poor (average Wrs between 81 and 86, 90-100 is ideal for Virginia). This is further indication that the vegetation growth is too dense, limiting bass foraging ability and reducing available nutrients for fish growth. Slight harvest of these smaller bass could benefit bass growth and is encouraged especially for bass below 13 inches. Anglers fishing for bass should concentrate on the edge of the Watershield lily-pads and drop offs around the main channel.

Lake Gordonsville offers a decent panfish fishery which includes Bluegill, Redear, and Black Crappie. Bluegill and Redear are not extremely abundant but there are some harvestable-sized fish (> 8 inches) available to anglers. The majority of Bluegill and Redear collected were

between 4 and 8 inches (Figure 3). No Bluegill and only one Redear > 9 inches were collected indicating that those larger-sized fish are not abundant and likely rare in angler catches. The lack of larger panfish is likely another indication that the extensive vegetation growth in the lake is affecting lake productivity and panfish growth. Anglers searching for these species should concentrate efforts around the sandy flats and brush piles in the spring and the deeper timber structure during the summer.

Crappie catch rates were acceptable (3.9 fish/net-night) but slightly lower than the historical average of 4.8 fish/net-night. All crappie collected from the lake were Black Crappie. Lake Gordonsville supports a decent crappie fishery with the majority collected in the 7-to-11-inch range (Figure 4). Crappie growth rates are less than ideal with fish not reaching 10-inches until age-5 (Figure 5) with the population containing a large percentage of older fish (up to age-11). The estimated annual survival rate of 68% was higher than observed in previous surveys and higher than desired in this system. The low growth rate combined with the numbers of older fish present in the population indicate that crappie harvest needs to increase to improve growth rates in Lake Gordonsville. Anglers should experience good success catching crappie between 8 and 10 inches, but larger fish will be quite rare.

Channel Catfish are stocked annually, but only fourteen were captured in our surveys. The low capture rate of catfish was due to our sampling gear rather than a lack of fish. Catfish collected ranged in size from 9 to 25 inches with an average length of 19 inches. Catfish anglers should try night crawlers or chicken livers around channel drop-offs or structure.

Anglers looking for a scenic experience close to the Richmond and Charlottesville areas should visit Lake Gordonsville. There is ample parking and a gravel ramp that accommodates most boats. Lake Gordonsville can be reached by taking Rt. 623 west from Rt. 15, several miles south of the Town of Gordonsville. The reservoir is open ½ hour before sunrise till ½ hour after sunset, and gas-powered motors are prohibited. If you plan to spend a day on the lake, be aware that a fishing permit, issued by Louisa County Parks and Recreation, is required to fish the lake. Permits are \$2.50 annually for Louisa residents, \$4 annually for Gordonsville residents and \$5.50 annually for all other anglers. Permits are obtained by contacting the Louisa County Treasurer's office (540.967.3435).

For more information on Lake Gordonsville, please contact:

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District Fisheries Biologist  
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources  
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(804) 305-8940

Table 1. Species account and catch rates for fish collected throughout Lake Gordonsville in 2025.

Species	Electrofishing			Trapnets		
	Number Collected	Catch Rate (fish/hour electrofishing)	Percentage of Catch	Number Collected	Catch Rate (fish/net-night)	Percentage of Catch
Black Crappie	5	5	3	118	3.9	34
Bluegill	37	37	24	142	4.7	41
Brown Bullhead	None Collected			21	0.7	6
Channel Catfish	None Collected			14	0.5	4
Creek Chubsucker	None Collected			1	0.1	<1
Golden Shiner	None Collected			6	0.2	2
Largemouth Bass	59	59	38	3	0.1	1
Redear Sunfish	46	46	30	35	1.2	10
White Sucker	6	6	4	5	0.2	1
Yellow Bullhead	1	1	1	None Collected		

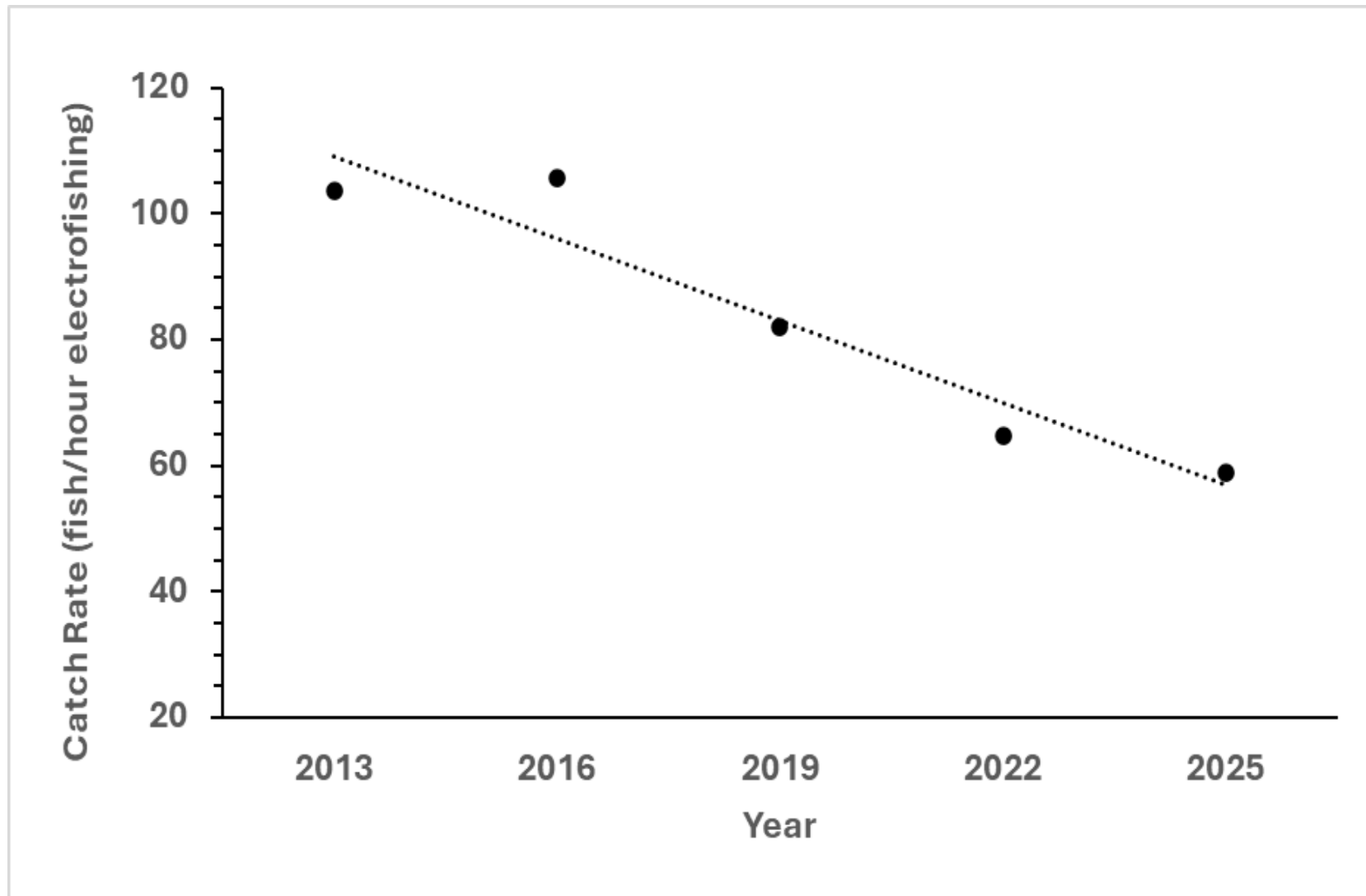


Figure 1. Trend in electrofishing catch rates of Largemouth Bass in Lake Gordonsville Reservoir.

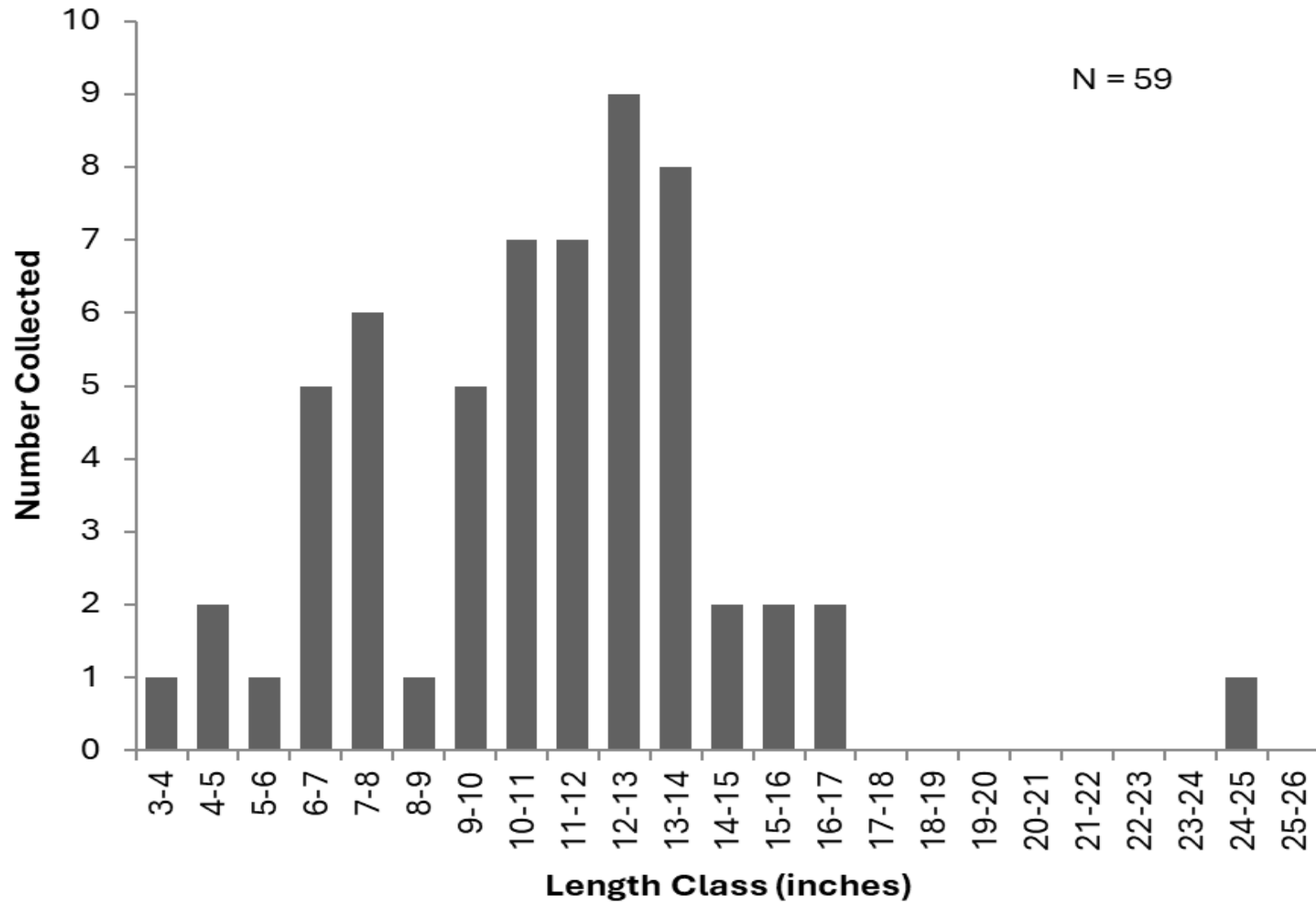


Figure 2. Length distribution of Largemouth Bass collected throughout Lake Gordonsville Reservoir in 2025.

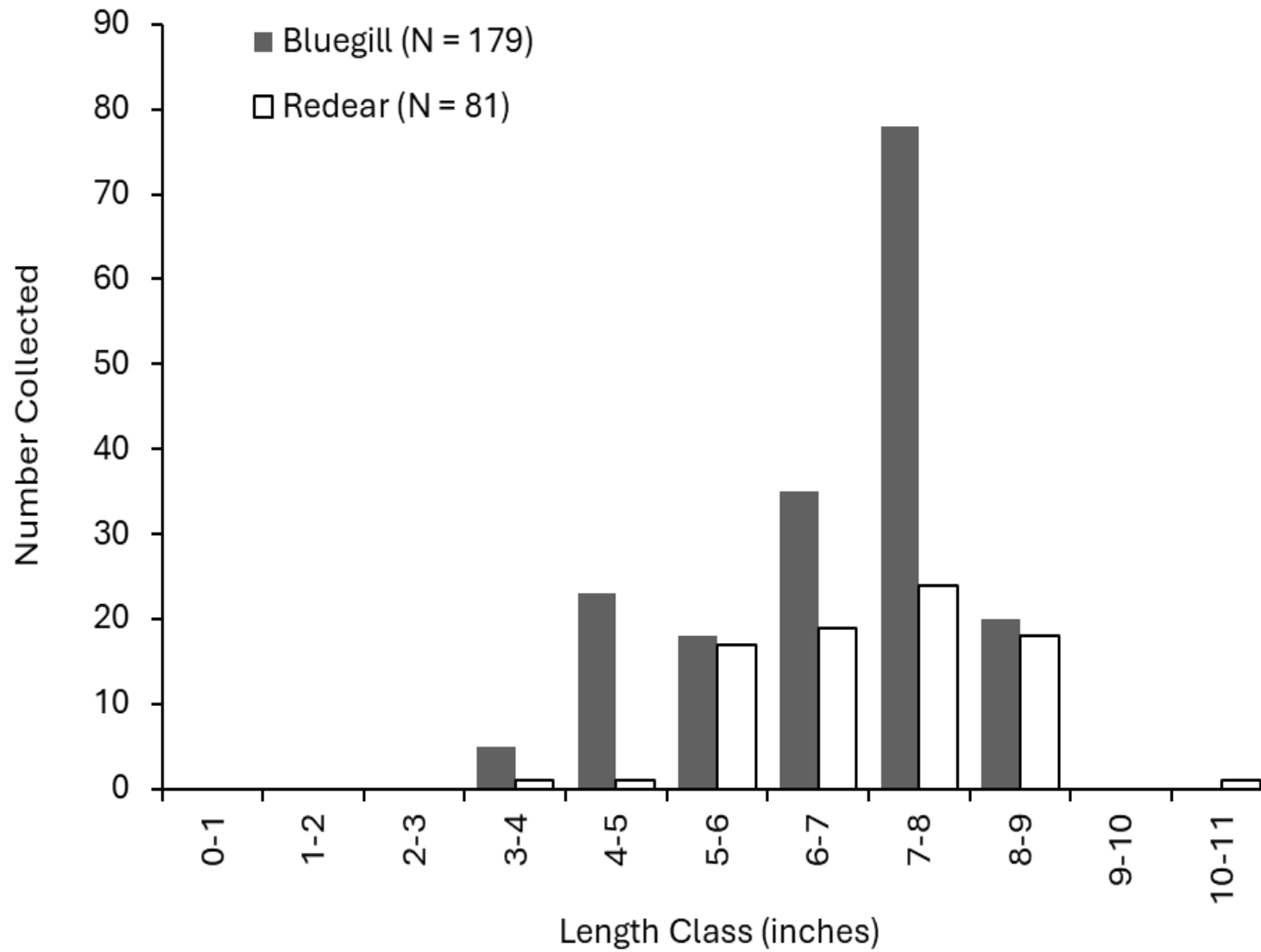


Figure 3. Length distribution of Bluegill and Redear collected throughout Lake Gordonsville in 2025.

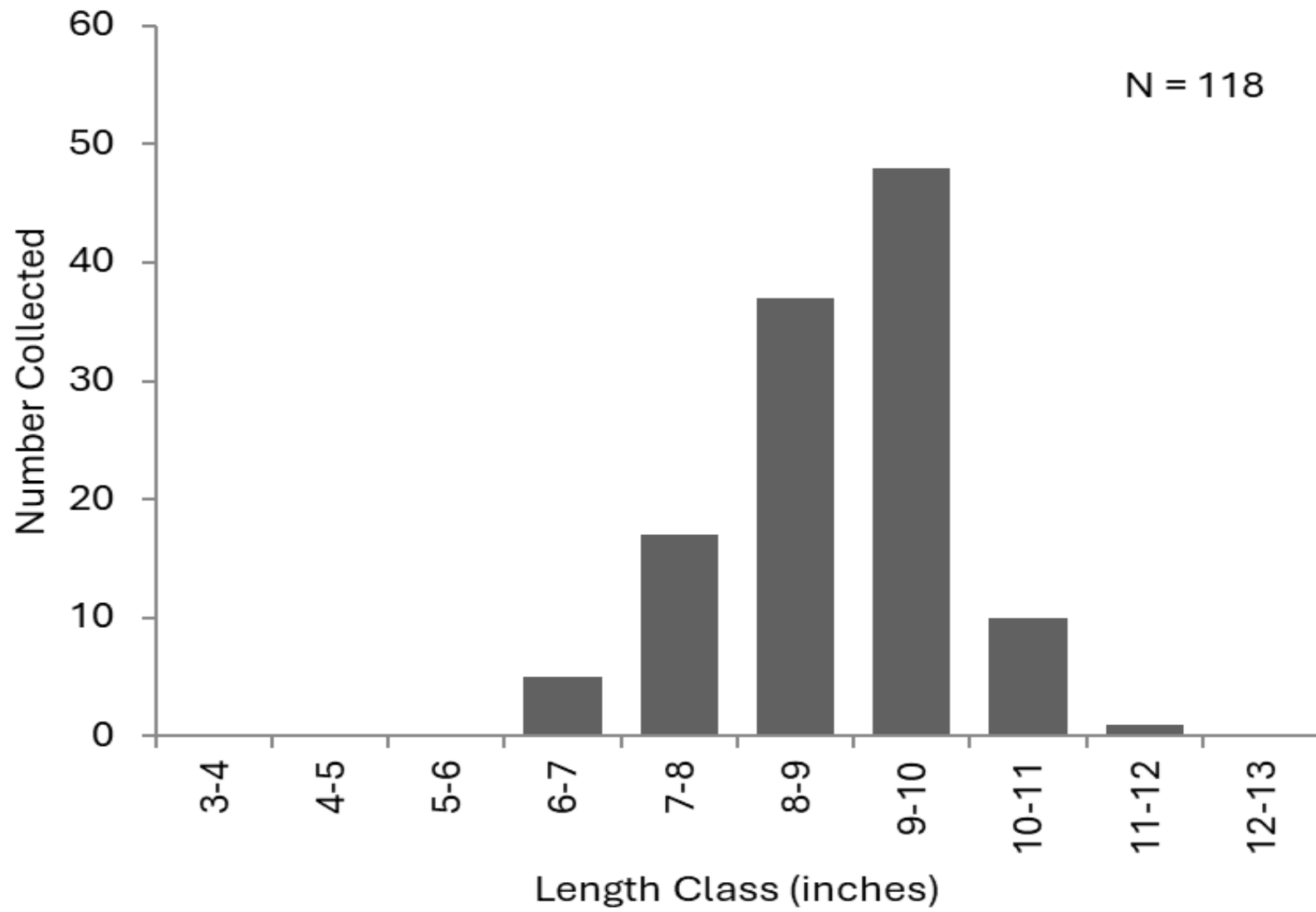


Figure 4. Length distribution of Black Crappie collected throughout Lake Gordonsville in 2025.

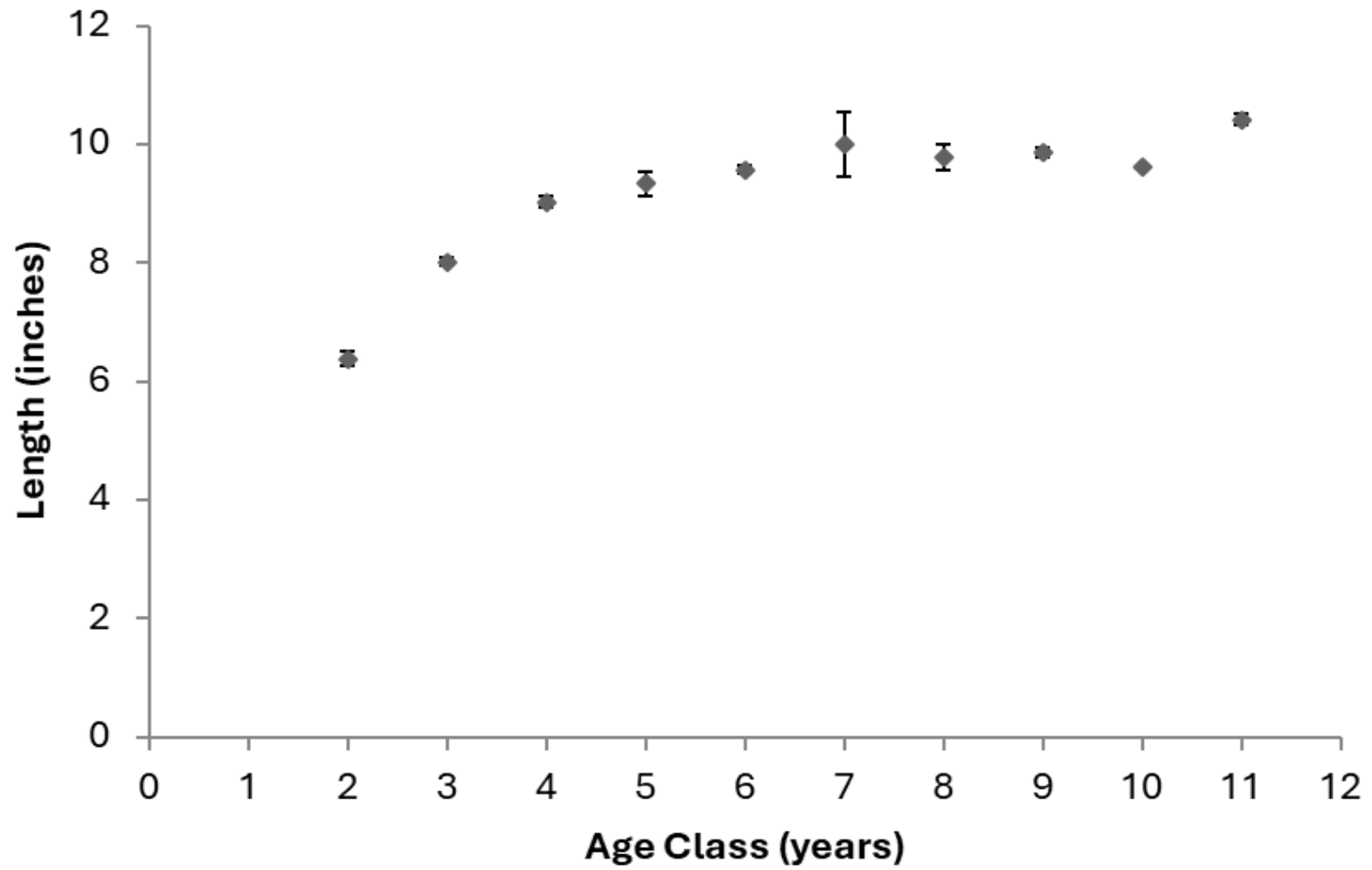


Figure 5. Average length-at-age of Black Crappie collected throughout Lake Gordonsville in 2025. Error bars indicate standard error.