

WILDLIFE RESOURCES
WARMWATER FISH MANAGEMENT

2023 STATE TOURNAMENT FISHING REPORT



WEST VIRGINIA

DNR

Introduction

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) began collecting bass fishing tournament data in 1975. For many years, bass tournaments were the only tournaments that provided data. Over the years, tournament angling in West Virginia has expanded to include catfish, crappie, walleye, musky, panfish, and trout. The goal of this document is to summarize the angler catch data to provide valuable information to West Virginia’s fishing community. Within this report, anglers can find which rivers and lakes had the best tournament success, catch-rates by month, average weights of fish in tournament weigh-ins, number of tournaments held per waterbody, etc. Anglers can use this information to plan tournaments or non-tournament fishing trips.

Summary of Results

The number of fishing tournaments and tournament angler effort increased in 2023 from the previous year. In 2023, a total of 746 fishing tournaments were held in West Virginia with a species breakdown of 659 black bass (Largemouth, Spotted and Smallmouth) tournaments, 63 catfish (Blue, Channel, and Flathead) tournaments, 11 Muskellunge tournaments, 12 crappie tournaments, and one trout tournament. Reported fishing tournaments were held on 34 waterbodies that included 13 reservoirs (>500 acres), 12 small impoundments (<500 acres), six small rivers, and three large rivers. In addition to traditional fishing tournaments that conduct events and weigh-ins at a single location, tournaments requiring lengths only and immediate releases for species such as Muskellunge and black bass occurring across multiple waterbodies are held. In 2023, 16 of these “statewide” fishing tournaments were reported.

BASS TOURNAMENTS

2023 was a good year for bass tournament anglers across West Virginia as reported catch-rates in both rivers and reservoirs were high. In 2023, anglers reported 659 bass tournaments and 140,285 tournament angler hours, which is second only to the number of tournaments and hours reported in 2022 (Figure 1). Bass tournaments are categorized into traditional and non-traditional tournaments. Traditional tournaments typically have official weigh-ins and are held at a specific location and dates. This tournament type has been and continues to be the most popular in West Virginia with 643 being reported in 2023 (Table 1). Non-traditional bass tournaments do not have

weigh-ins and are held on multiple waterbodies on the same days. There were 16 non-traditional tournaments reported in 2023. Angler effort and location was not provided for non-traditional tournaments due to the difficulty for tournament organizers to obtain this information. Angler effort and angler catch-rate (number of 12-inch and larger bass per hour) for specific waterbodies presented within this report includes data from traditional tournaments only, as the data provided by non-traditional tournaments is insufficient. For statewide estimates, traditional and non-traditional tournament data is combined.

Angler effort slightly decreased from a record high of 143,057 hours in 2022 to 140,285 hours in 2023 (Figure 1). Nearly 52% of the reported bass tournament effort in 2023 were on reservoirs (>500 acres) with 369 tournaments and 72,349 hours being reported (Table 1). Ohio River's tournament anglers increased their effort from the previous year and had the most reported tournament angler hours for any waterbody in 2023 at 37,739. Belleville and Hannibal pools were the most heavily fished pools on the Ohio River (Table 1). Summersville Lake had the highest reported hours for reservoirs with 20,541 (Table 1 - 2). Pressure, defined as tournament hours per acre, was highest at Summersville Lake and Sutton Lake in 2023 with 9.4 and 7.6 hours per acre (Table 2). In contrast, the Ohio River pools, and Mt. Storm Lake reported the lowest pressure (Table 2). April, May, June had the highest reported tournament hours, but July through October angler effort remained relatively high (Table 4). This past year reported tournament angler hours were highest in June at 26,404.

Since 2006, annual catch-rates for bass tournament anglers have been greater than the average catch rate since 1975 (Figure 2). The overall annual state-wide bass tournament catch-rate for 2023 was 0.20 bass per hour (all black bass), which was slightly higher than reported in 2022 (Figure 2). Anglers reported better overall success in lakes (reservoirs and small impoundments) versus rivers during 2023 bass tournaments (Figure 3). However, the upper Ohio River pools this past year had some of the highest reported angler catch-rates, with New Cumberland Pool having the highest reported catch-rate in the state (Table 2). Tournament anglers reported Mt. Storm having the highest catch-rate of any reservoir (Table 2). Over the last three years, Sutton Lake, Jennings Randolph Lake, Cheat Lake, Summersville Lake, Tygart Lake, and Monongahela River have had the highest average reported catch-rates (Table 3). Tournament catch-rates were relatively consistent throughout the year with the highest being reported for the months of April, September, and November (Table 4).

The average weight per bass tournament reported in 2023 was slightly less than reported in the previous year (Figure 4). Anglers commonly report weights from large rivers and reservoirs, but typically do not from the smaller rivers and impoundments. Generally, anglers reported slightly heavier average weights per fish from reservoirs than in large rivers (Table 1). Tournament anglers reported the heaviest bass, about 2-lbs each on average, from R.D. Bailey Lake, East Lynn Lake, and Stonewall Jackson Lake (Table 1). The heaviest average weights per tournament were reported in April and November (Table 4). The heaviest lunker bass reported at a tournament in 2023 was a 7.1-pound Largemouth Bass from Stonewall Jackson Lake (Table 1). Other waterbodies reporting lunker bass heavier than six pounds were the Winfield Pool of Kanawha River (Smallmouth Bass), Racine Pool of Ohio River (Smallmouth Bass), Beech Fork Lake (Largemouth Bass), and East Lynn Lake (Largemouth Bass). A Smallmouth Bass caught at Summersville Lake was reported to be 24.8 inches long, which is less than one inch shy of the West Virginia state record.

Figure 1. Reported number of West Virginia bass tournaments and angler hours from 1975 through 2023. Angler effort includes only traditional tournaments.

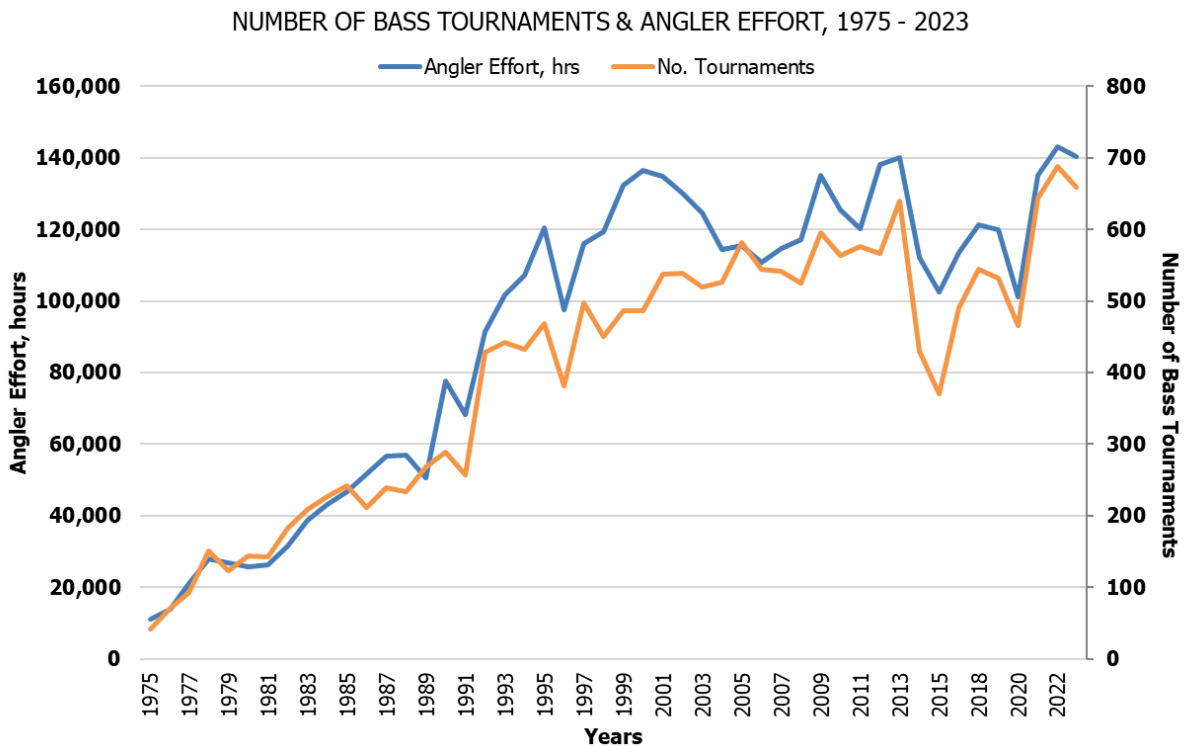


Figure 2. West Virginia bass tournament catch-rates defined as the number of 12-inch and larger black bass per hour reported from 1975 through 2023 for all waterbody types. The overall catch-rate from 1975 through 2023 equals 0.15 bass per hour and is represented by the dashed line.

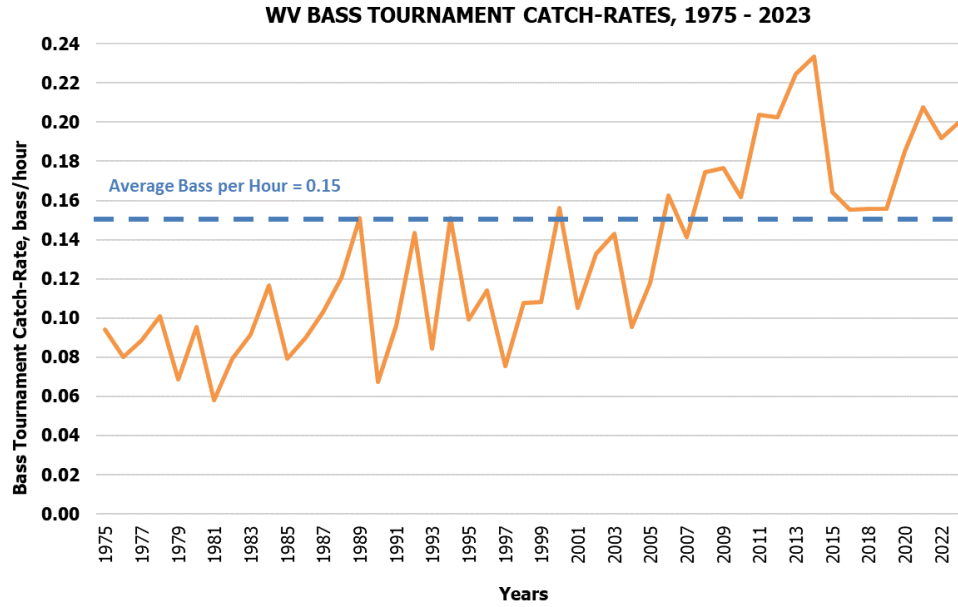


Figure 3. Bass tournament catch-rates for West Virginia’s rivers and reservoirs from 1975 through 2023.

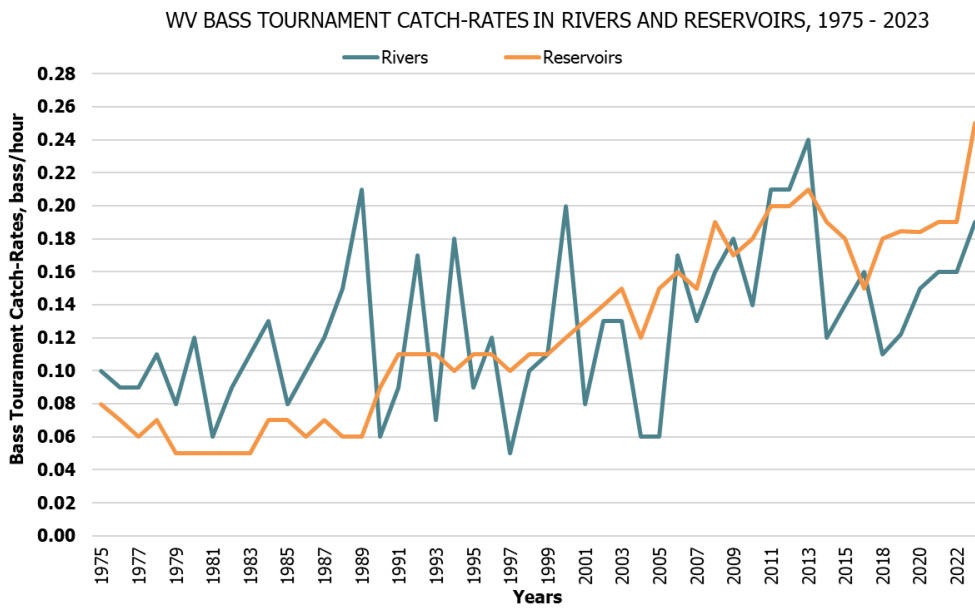


Figure 4. Average bass weight per tournament reported from 2002 through 2023 for all waterbody types.

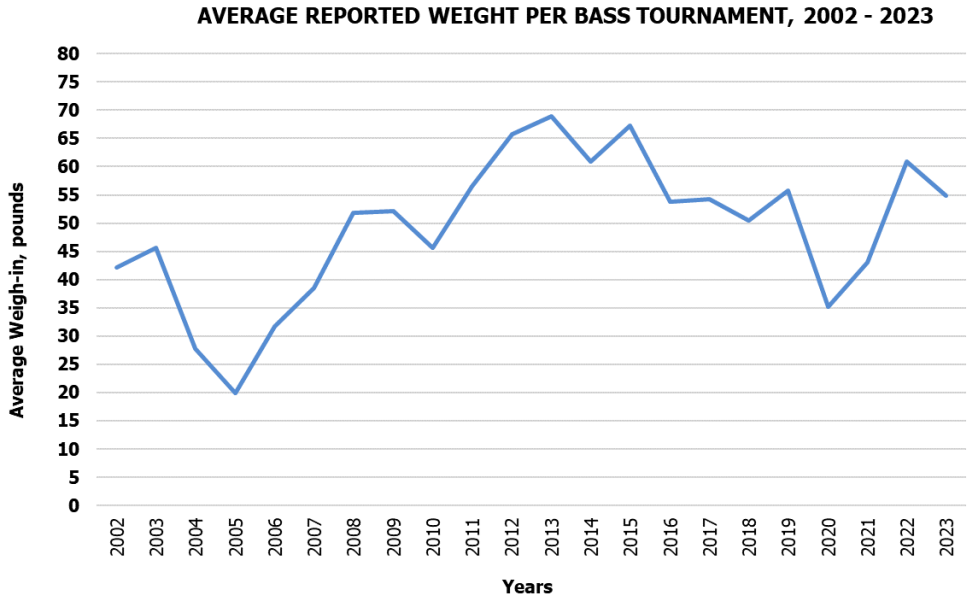


Table 1. Results for West Virginia bass tournaments held in 2023. Data represents 12-inch and larger bass. * Angler effort hours not provided by non-traditional tournaments for specific waterbodies.

Location	No. Tournaments	Effort, hrs	Reported Number of Bass				Reported Bass per hour				Reported Bass Weight, lbs		Reported Lunker Bass		
			All	LMB	SMB	SPB	All	LMB	SMB	SPB	Total Weight	Average	Species	Weigh	Length
Winfield Pool	38	7,673	1,042	342	620	80	0.14	0.04	0.08	0.01	1272	1.2	SMB	6.3	21.0
RC Byrd Pool	8	736	116	9	99	8	0.16	0.01	0.13	0.01	131	1.1	SMB	4.2	.
Kanawha	46	8,409	1,158	351	719	88	0.14	0.04	0.09	0.01	1,403	1.2	.	.	.
Opekiska Pool	31	8,609	1,521	1,204	248	69	0.18	0.14	0.03	0.01	2,019	1.3	LMB	5.0	21.0
Point Marion Pool	8	1,043	209	151	50	8	0.20	0.14	0.05	0.01	290	1.4	LMB	3.8	18.3
Monongahela	39	9,652	1,730	1,355	298	77	0.18	0.14	0.03	0.01	2,309	1.3	.	.	.
New Cumberland Pool	14	1,973	701	85	490	26	0.36	0.04	0.25	0.01	998	1.4	LMB	5.6	21.0
Pike Island Pool	8	2,112	659	9	650	20	0.31	0.00	0.31	0.01	839	1.3	SMB	3.9	18.0
Hannibal Pool	26	10,195	2,530	84	2,275	161	0.25	0.01	0.22	0.02	3,310	1.3	SMB	5.7	21.0
Willow Island Pool	10	6,398	1,187	375	652	160	0.19	0.06	0.10	0.03	1,517	1.3	SMB	4.0	19.0
Belleville Pool	43	9,475	1,661	667	794	200	0.18	0.07	0.18	0.02	1,331	0.8	SMB	4.3	21.8
Racine Pool	32	5,364	650	361	178	110	0.12	0.07	0.03	0.02	883	1.4	SMB	6.0	19.0
R. C. Byrd Pool	5	2,094	263	63	117	83	0.13	0.03	0.06	0.04	346	1.3	SMB	4.2	.
Greenup Pool	1	128	13	6	3	4	0.10	0.05	0.02	0.03	17	1.3	LMB	1.8	14.0
Ohio	139	37,739	7,664	1,650	5,159	764	0.20	0.04	0.14	0.02	9,242	1.2	.	.	.
All Large Rivers	224	55,799	10,552	3,356	6,176	929	0.19	0.06	0.11	0.02	12,954	1.2	.	.	.
Bluestone River	1	72	3	0	3	0	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.00	.	.	.	.	.
Elk River	1	383	5	1	4	0	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	.	.	SMB	.	17.0
Greenbrier	2	1,041	82	0	82	0	0.08	0.00	0.08	0.00	.	.	SMB	.	18.3
New River	1	270	79	0	79	0	0.29	0.00	0.29	0.00	.	.	SMB	.	19.8
Tygart River	1	154	14	14	0	0	0.09	0.09	0.00	0.00	7	0.5	.	.	.
West Fork River	1	6	4	3	1	0	0.67	0.50	0.17	0.00	.	.	SMB	.	16.5
All Small Rivers	7	1925.5	187	18	169	0	0.10	0.01	0.09	0.00	7	0.3	.	.	.
Beech Fork Lake	80	6,128	683	677	0	6	0.11	0.11	0.00	0.00	1,236	1.8	LMB	6.6	23.0
Bluestone Lake	11	2,579	362	118	215	29	0.14	0.05	0.08	0.01	574	1.6	LMB	5.7	22.0
Burnsville Lake	12	2,027	385	359	2	24	0.19	0.18	0.00	0.01	514	1.3	LMB	4.8	21.0
Cheat Lake	23	3,319	872	641	197	24	0.26	0.19	0.06	0.01	1,180	1.4	LMB	5.3	20.5
East Lynn Lake	40	5,905	722	698	3	21	0.12	0.12	0.00	0.00	1,506	2.1	LMB	6.5	24.0
Jennings Randolph	3	424	98	7	91	0	0.23	0.02	0.21	0.00	112	1.1	LMB	4.0	.
Mount Storm Lake	6	1,084	346	171	175	0	0.32	0.16	0.16	0.00	423	1.2	SMB	3.1	15.4
R. D. Bailey Lake	4	1,115	159	93	10	56	0.14	0.08	0.01	0.05	348	2.2	LMB	5.7	22.0
Stonewall Lake	15	2,329	432	334	92	6	0.19	0.14	0.04	0.00	622	1.4	LMB	5.2	19.3
Stonewall Jackson	40	12,367	2,209	1,905	6	243	0.18	0.15	0.00	0.02	4,419	2.0	LMB	7.1	22.0
Summersville Lake	66	20,541	4,855	558	4,256	21	0.24	0.03	0.21	0.00	6,114	1.3	SMB	5.0	24.8
Sutton Lake	41	10,636	2,728	1,678	343	737	0.26	0.16	0.03	0.07	3,803	1.4	LMB	5.3	21.5
Tygart Lake	28	3,897	1,089	129	958	0	0.28	0.03	0.25	0.00	1,353	1.2	LMB	5.7	21.0
All Reservoirs	369	72,349	14,940	7,368	6,348	1,167	0.21	0.10	0.09	0.02	22,204	1.5	.	.	.
Conaway Lake	2	156	33	33	0	0	0.21	0.21	0.00	0.00	.	.	LMB	.	21.8
Curtisville Lake	1	65	22	22	0	0	0.34	0.34	0.00	0.00	.	.	LMB	.	20.5
Dog Run Lake	2	18	15	15	0	0	0.83	0.83	0.00	0.00	.	.	LMB	.	13.8
Elk Fork Lake	4	706	193	193	0	0	0.27	0.27	0.00	0.00	.	.	LMB	.	21.5
Mountwood Lake	1	39	3	3	0	0	0.08	0.08	0.00	0.00	.	.	LMB	.	16.5
North Bend Lake	5	576	136	135	1	0	0.24	0.23	0.00	0.00	.	.	LMB	.	23.5
O'Brien Lake	2	266	83	83	0	0	0.31	0.31	0.00	0.00	.	.	LMB	.	22.5
Plum Orchard Lake	1	90	29	29	0	0	0.32	0.32	0.00	0.00	20	0.7	LMB	1.1	14.5
Stephens Lake	22	2,550	640	632	7	1	0.25	0.25	0.00	0.00	917	1.4	LMB	3.6	17.0
Upper Mud Lake	1	48	14	14	0	0	0.29	0.29	0.00	0.00	31	2.2	LMB	4.5	.
Woodrum Lake	2	148	44	44	0	0	0.30	0.30	0.00	0.00	.	.	LMB	.	19.0
All Small Impoundments	43	4,662	1,212	1,203	8	1	0.26	0.26	0.00	0.00	968	1.2	.	.	.
Statewide non-traditional	16	5,550	1,142	529	592	21	0.21	0.10	0.11	0.00	.	.	.	.	.
Total Bass Results	659	140,285	28,033	12,474	13,293	2,118	0.20	0.09	0.09	0.02	36,133	1.1	.	.	.

Table 2. Top 10 rankings for West Virginia waterbodies having $\geq 1,000$ bass tournament hours in 2023. Does not include non-traditional tournaments.

Ranking	Waterbody	Bass per hour	Tournament hours	Surface acres	Tournament hours per acre
1	New Cumberland Pool of Ohio River	0.36	1,973	2,422	0.8
2	Mount Storm Lake	0.32	1,084	1,200	0.9
3	Pike Island Pool of Ohio River	0.31	2,112	4,691	0.5
4	Tygart Lake	0.28	3,897	1,750	1.9
5	Cheat Lake	0.27	3,319	1,730	1.9
6	Sutton Lake	0.26	10,636	1,520	7.0
7	Stephens Lake	0.25	2,550	272	9.4
7	Hannibal Pool of Ohio River	0.25	10,195	5,695	1.8
8	Summersville Lake	0.24	20,541	2,700	7.6
9	Point Marion Pool of Monongahela River	0.20	1,043	613	1.7
10	Burnsville Lake	0.19	2,027	968	2.1
10	Willow Island Pool of Ohio River	0.19	6,398	5,517	1.2
10	Stonecoal Lake	0.19	2,329	550	4.2

Table 3. Three (3) year catch-rate for selected waterbodies with annual catch-rates for 2021-2023. Does not include non-traditional tournaments

Rank	Waterbody	3-year average	2023	2022	2021
1	Sutton Lake	0.27	0.26	0.31	0.23
2	Jennings Randolph Lake	0.26	0.23	0.23	0.34
3	Cheat Lake	0.24	0.26	0.23	0.23
3	Summersville Lake	0.24	0.24	0.26	0.23
3	Tygart Lake	0.24	0.28	0.19	0.24
4	Mount Storm Lake	0.23	0.32	0.14	0.24
5	Monongahela River	0.20	0.18	0.23	0.20
6	Stonewall Jackson Lake	0.17	0.18	0.16	0.17
6	Stonecoal Lake	0.17	0.19	0.17	0.15
6	Ohio River	0.17	0.20	0.13	0.18
7	Burnsville Lake	0.16	0.19	0.13	0.15
8	Bluestone Lake	0.15	0.14	0.16	0.12
9	Kanawha River	0.14	0.14	0.16	0.12
10	R.D. Bailey Lake	0.13	0.14	0.16	0.09
11	East Lynn Lake	0.12	0.12	0.13	0.10
12	Beech Fork Lake	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.11

Table 4. West Virginia bass tournament results by month in 2023. Does not include non-traditional tournaments.

Month	No. Tournaments	Tournament Hours	Reported No. of Bass	Bass per hour	Reported Weight, lbs.	Avg. Weight per Tournament
January	1	430	103	0.24	*	*
February	*	*	*	*	*	*
March	7	1,371	195	0.14	391	56
April	74	18,895	3,787	0.21	5,606	76
May	103	23,135	4,738	0.20	6,398	62
June	118	26,404	5,052	0.19	6,690	57
July	93	17,367	3,444	0.20	4,931	53
August	87	16,081	2,870	0.18	3,174	36
September	94	18,142	3,865	0.21	4,033	43
October	61	15,154	3,064	0.20	3,493	57
November	21	3,908	885	0.23	1,416	67
December	*	*	*	*	*	*
Total	659	140,285	28,003	0.20	36,133	55

CATFISH TOURNAMENTS

The WVDNR began monitoring catfish tournaments in 2008 as catfish popularity was increasing with tournament anglers. Sixty-three catfish tournaments reported catch data in 2023, which was the second most on record (Table 5). The majority of catfish tournaments were held on the Ohio River with tournaments reporting 16,420 angler hours (Table 6). The R.C. Byrd Pool of Ohio River and the Winfield Pool of Kanawha River had the most reported tournaments and angler effort in 2023 (Table 6).

Flathead Catfish continue to be the dominant species reported by tournament anglers throughout all pools of the Ohio and Kanawha rivers (Table 5). Blue Catfish are a smaller portion of the overall catfish tournament catch, but have developed into a significant fishery, especially in the R.C. Byrd Pool since the WVDNR began restoration of this species in the Ohio River in the early 2000's. Consequently, Blue Catfish made up about 22% of the total number of catfish reported in 2023 (Table 6). Tournaments reported weighing about 11,693 pounds of catfish for an average of 186 pounds per tournament and 8.6 pounds per catfish (Table 6). The heaviest weights per tournament reported were from the Racine and Greenup pools of Ohio River with 344 pounds and 334 pounds on average respectively (Table 6). The heaviest catfish reported was a 51.0 pound Flathead Catfish from the Belleville Pool of Ohio River.

Table 5. Annual summary of West Virginia Catfish tournaments from 2008 through 2023. *Lunker weight was reported from the Greenup Pool of Ohio River.

Year	No. Tournaments	Effort, hours	Catfish per hour	Reported Number of Catfish				% of Reported Catfish			Reported Weight, lbs	Lunker Species	Lunker Weight, lbs
				All	CHC	FLC	BLC	CHC	FLC	BLC			
2008	40	14,526	0.07	1,032	348	684	0	34	66	0	3,988	.	.
2009	18	14,158	0.06	824	351	471	2	43	57	0	3,367	.	.
2010	31	16,448	0.05	818	274	524	20	33	64	2	*	.	.
2011	38	14,846	0.07	968	364	569	35	38	59	4	3,531	.	.
2012	57	16,540	0.06	1,036	357	644	35	34	62	3	7,469	.	.
2013	56	19,271	0.11	2,054	638	1,342	74	31	65	4	16,113	.	.
2014	43	16,071	0.09	1,519	524	949	46	34	62	3	13,334	.	.
2015	42	15,535	0.08	1,213	459	676	78	38	56	6	9,173	.	.
2016	38	13,064	0.08	1,022	335	639	48	33	63	5	8,370	.	.
2017	34	11,714	0.08	913	391	483	39	43	53	4	7,416	.	.
2018	48	11,136	0.09	991	367	555	69	37	56	7	8,446	.	.
2019	50	14,838	0.10	1,512	399	881	232	26	58	15	13,896	.	.
2020	30	10,693	0.08	827	204	427	296	25	52	36	10,879	.	.
2021	68	17,372	0.09	1,609	405	1,117	251	25	69	16	15,279	.	.
2022	58	14,423	0.08	1,127	321	593	213	28	53	19	8,611	Flathead	53.4
2023	63	16,420	0.08	1,358	374	685	303	28	50	22	11,693	Flathead	51.0
Total	714	237,055	0.08	18,823	6,111	11,239	1,741	32	60	9	141,565	Flathead	53.4*

Table 6. Reported results for all West Virginia waterbodies where catfish tournaments were held in 2022.

Waterbody	No. Tournaments	Effort, hours	No. Catfish	Catfish per hour	No. per Species			Weight, lbs	Average Weight per Catfish, lbs	Average Weight per Tournament, lbs	Reported Lunker Blue Catfish, lbs	Lunker Flathead
					BLC	CHC	FLC					
New Cumberland Pool	8	1,884	69	0.04	0	30	39	.	.	.	.	.
Hannibal Pool	5	455	58	0.13	0	29	29	366	6.3	73	.	48.3
Belleville Pool	7	1,828	175	0.10	27	48	100	1956	11.2	279	46.8	51.0
Racine Pool	1	208	30	0.14	5	1	24	344	11.5	344	.	.
R.C. Byrd Pool	21	7,294	586	0.08	182	173	231	5,716	9.8	272	42.0	44.5
Greenup Pool	4	651	137	0.21	47	23	67	1,338	9.8	334	38.5	33.9
Ohio River	46	12,320	1055	0.09	261	304	490	9,720	9.7	261	46.8	51.0
Marmet	3	840	70	0.08	3	18	49	.	.	.	.	.
Winfield Pool	10	2,177	171	0.08	27	19	125	1,874	11.0	.	.	42.3
Kanawha River	13	3,017	241	0.08	30	37	174	1,874	11.0	144	.	42.3
Bluestone Lake	1	176	19	0.11	2	0	21	74	3.9	74	.	.
Elk River	1	383	1	0.00	0	1	0	.	.	.	.	.
Ridenhour Lake	2	525	42	0.08	10	32	0	26	.	.	.	.
Total	63	16,420	1,358	0.08	303	374	685	11,693	8.6	186	46.8	51.0

MUSKELLUNGE, CRAPPIE, and TROUT TOURNAMENTS

Eleven Muskellunge tournaments were reported in 2023 accounting for 3,208 angler hours from multiple waterbodies across the state. Anglers reported catching and releasing 29 Muskellunge during these tournaments with the longest being 40.5-inches from Stonewall Jackson Lake. Twelve crappie tournaments were held in 2023 at multiple waterbodies with 755 crappie reported. Tournament crappie angler effort doubled from 2022 and was reported to be 1,639 hours in 2023, which resulted in a catch-rate of 0.46 fish caught per hour. The longest crappie reported was 16.0 inches and the heaviest reported weight was 1.71 pounds, both from Burnsville Lake. One trout tournament was reported from Laurel Lake (Mingo County) in 2023. Eighty-two anglers participated in this tournament and reported catching 40 fish.

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