



Results from the 2009-2010 Fall Walleye Index Netting (FWIN) Surveys in Washington State



Washington Department of FISH and WILDLIFE

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Introduction

Effective management of recreational fisheries requires standardized sampling as well as the ability to manipulate fish populations through management efforts. In addition, managers must have an understanding of how changes in biological systems affect angler participation and success.

Fall Walleye Index Netting (FWIN) methodologies were developed in Ontario and adopted by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) fisheries managers in 2002 as a means of monitoring a wide variety of biological parameters in walleye populations in a standardized fashion. Fisheries biologists from WDFW conduct FWIN surveys on five important walleye fisheries in eastern Washington (Figure 1) when water temps are 50–59°F, a range at which walleye are more equally distributed throughout lakes. Sampling effort (i.e. nets set per lake) is based on lake size, or the minimum number of nets needed to collect 300 walleye (Table 1).



The FWIN nets are 8-panel gill nets 200 feet long and have a catch bias toward percids (walleye and perch). Length and weight data, as well as relative abundance estimates, on other fish species are collected and presented but should be scrutinized. For instance, low numbers of largemouth bass and bluegill are not a cause for concern since these species are more effectively sampled using a boat electrofisher. In addition, length averages of smallmouth bass collected in gill nets tend to be higher than those collected via boat electrofishing and must be interpreted accordingly.

We collect length and age data on all walleye which allow us to determine the size distribution of the walleye population, the percentage of harvestable fish in the population and at what age walleye recruit to the fishery. Walleye ages are determined from otoliths, which provide a precise age estimate. It is important to note that female walleye typically grow faster and larger than male walleye; however, females typically mature at an older age than males. When setting harvest regulations it is important for managers to keep this in mind to avoid overharvest of females which often grow to legal size at a younger age yet may not be reproductively mature. This information becomes critical in systems with high harvest rates.



Fortunately walleye harvest in Washington lakes is at acceptable levels. Length-at-age data, when combined with abundance data, also help us determine if a change in

regulations is necessary or if regulations are helping us meet our management goals (Table 2).

The average number of walleye collected per net gives fisheries managers an accurate index of walleye population size. Throughout this report we report this as catch per unit effort (CPUE \pm 80% confidence intervals). Abundance estimates, when examined over multiple years, reveal trends in populations and allow managers to make informed decisions on possible changes in angling regulations. Significant declines in abundance may signal a need for more restrictive regulations; whereas, increases in abundance, or stable populations at high abundance, may indicate the need for more liberal regulations (Figure 2).

Overall, walleye abundance in our FWIN waters is excellent with most lakes containing good numbers of harvestable fish. The average CPUE for all lakes in 2009 and 2010 was 15 and 16 walleye per net, respectively. In 2009 and 2010 approximately 51 percent of the walleye collected from all lakes were over 14 inches. Growth of walleye in Moses Lake, Potholes Reservoir, and Scootney Reservoir was excellent with walleye reaching 16 inches by fall of their second year. Growth of walleye in Banks Lake and FDR was slightly slower with walleye reaching 16 inches by fall of their third and fourth year, respectively.

In speaking to many anglers and fishing clubs we have found that there is a strong catch-and-release mentality among many angler groups. Our data on walleye populations over the past nine years indicate that our populations can endure more harvest. In fact, in 2006 we raised the daily limit to 8 walleye per day on Lake Roosevelt, Potholes Reservoir, and Moses Lake. Unfortunately, few anglers took advantage of this as the results from our two year creel survey on Potholes Reservoir and Moses Lake indicated that very few anglers ever retained a limit of walleye. We would like to take this opportunity to encourage anglers to harvest more walleye.

Besides walleye, yellow perch, smallmouth bass and lake whitefish were abundant in several of our FWIN lakes. Yellow perch populations are quite cyclical; however, perch fishing on Banks Lake and Moses Lake can be excellent at times. Smallmouth bass are abundant, and anglers report excellent fishing for them on all our FWIN lakes with the exception of Scootney Reservoir. Lake whitefish were abundant on FDR, Banks Lake, and Potholes Reservoir, yet are underutilized by most angler groups. There is a small, but dedicated, group of wintertime lake whitefish anglers on Banks Lake who target whitefish under the ice. We are trying to encourage anglers to diversify their angling experiences by fishing for, and harvesting, more lake whitefish.

This report serves as a status update on major walleye fisheries in Washington and also as an informational guide on other fisheries in these lakes. For further details on the

FWIN surveys conducted on various waters please contact the following regional warmwater fisheries biologists.

Lake Roosevelt and Scootenev Reservoir

Marc Divens or Randall Osborne
 WDFW Region One
 2315 North Discovery Place
 Spokane Valley, WA 99216-1566
 (509) 892-1001

Banks Lake, Moses Lake, and Potholes Reservoir

Marc Petersen or Mike Schmuck
 WDFW Region Two
 1550 Alder Street NW
 Ephrata, WA 98823
 (509) 754-4546 x222 or x227

Table 1. Recommended minimum number of net sets for FWIN surveys based on lake surface area.

Water body surface area (hectares)	Minimum number of net sets	
<200		8
201—500	<i>Scootenev</i>	12
501—1000		14
1001—2000	<i>Moses*</i>	18
2001—3000		22
3000—5000		28
5001—10,000	<i>Potholes*</i>	36
10,001—20,000	<i>Banks</i>	48
>20,000	<i>FDR</i>	150

**Typically reach biological threshold of 300 walleye before minimum net number.*

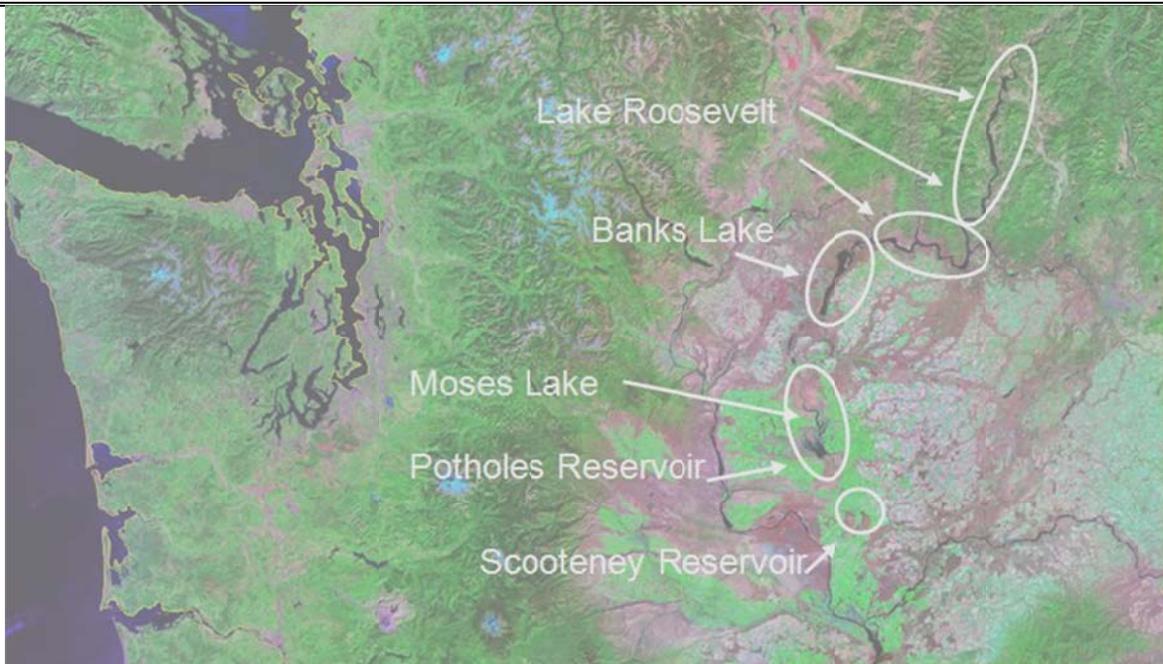


Figure 1. Map of FWIN lakes in Washington.

Table 2. Walleye regulations for Washington FWIN Lakes (as of 2011).

Lake	Season	Rule
Lake Roosevelt	Year-round	No Min. Size, Daily limit 8, only 1 over 22" may be retained.
Banks Lake	Year-round	Min. Size 16", Daily limit 5, only 1 over 22" may be retained.
Moses Lake	Year-round	Min. Size 12", Daily limit 8, only 1 over 22" may be retained.
Potholes Reservoir	Year-round	Min. Size 12", Daily limit 8, only 1 over 22" may be retained.
Scooteney Reservoir	Year-round	Min. Size 12", Daily limit 5, only 1 over 22" may be retained.

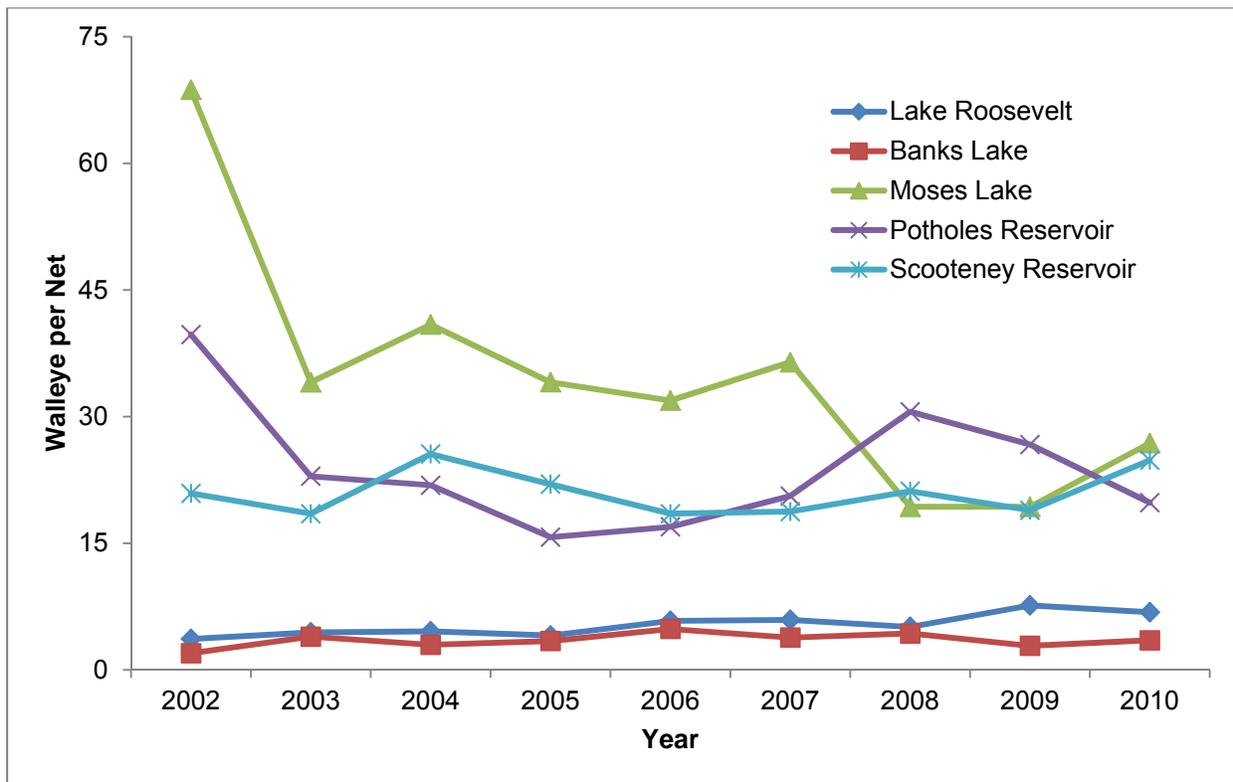


Figure 2. Trends in catch per unit effort of walleye collected during FWIN surveys for all lakes 2002–2010.

Lake Roosevelt (FDR)

Walleye CPUE in Lake Roosevelt was low when compared to more southern lakes (Moses Lake, Potholes Reservoir and Scootenev Reservoir) during all years (02–10) and varied from 3.6–7.6 walleye per net (Figure 3). The average size of walleye collected in 09–10 was 14 inches and corresponds to walleye age-3 and below (Figure 4, 5 and 6). From 2002–10 only 20 percent of walleye collected were of harvestable size (≥ 16 inches). This



percentage reached its peak in 2005 when approximately 27 percent of the walleye collected were at least 16 inches. Overall, very few large walleye were collected on Lake Roosevelt; however, this fishery appears to be stable and provides anglers with adequate numbers of catchable (> 12 inches) if not harvestable (>16 inch) walleye. Despite low walleye densities FDR walleye tournament anglers have the highest catch rates (average .353 walleye/ hr of fishing) among FWIN monitored fisheries (WDFW unpublished data).

Besides walleye, various other game fish species were collected during FWIN surveys on Lake Roosevelt. Smallmouth bass dominated the catch in both 2009 and 2010 while other species ranged in abundance from 1 to 16 percent of the total catch (Figure 7). Smallmouth bass are an important game fish in Lake Roosevelt with anglers targeting them throughout the year. Other good game fish opportunities in FDR include rainbow trout, kokanee, yellow perch, burbot and lake whitefish. Lake whitefish are underutilized in all lakes in Washington in which they reside, but they are fun to catch and make very good table fare.

There are numerous access points along the 125 mile length of FDR on both sides. They are owned and operated by state, city, county and federal agencies, along with tribes and private businesses. There are both boat ramps and good shore angling opportunities. There are also numerous campgrounds, resorts and RV parking.

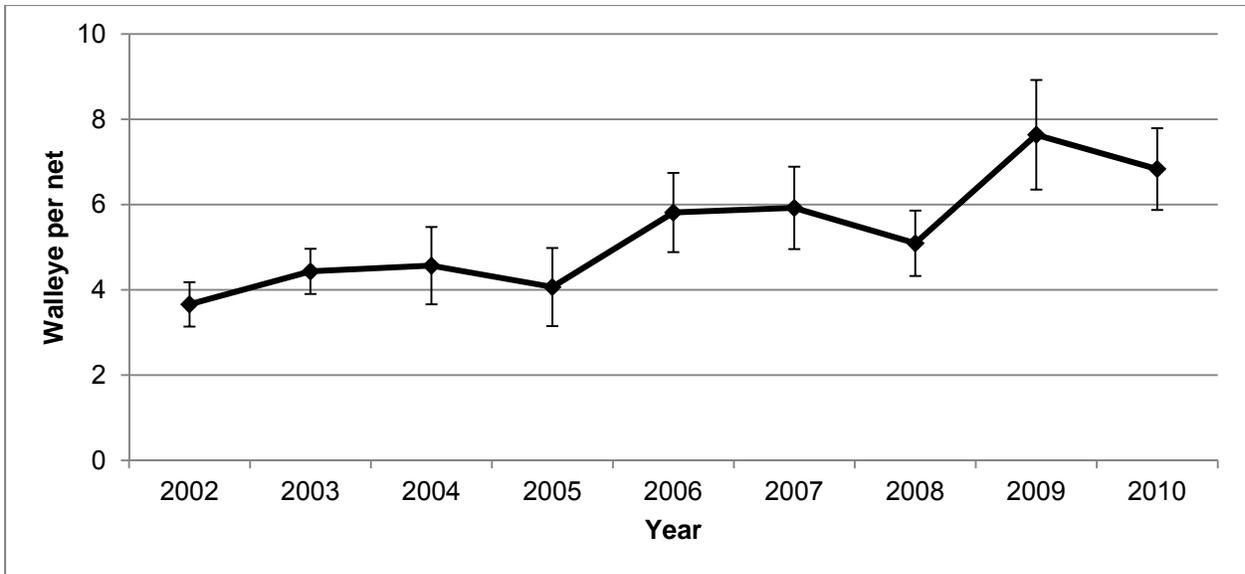


Figure 3. Catch per unit effort (\pm 80% CI) of walleye for all FWIN surveys on Lake Roosevelt (FDR) from 2002–2010.

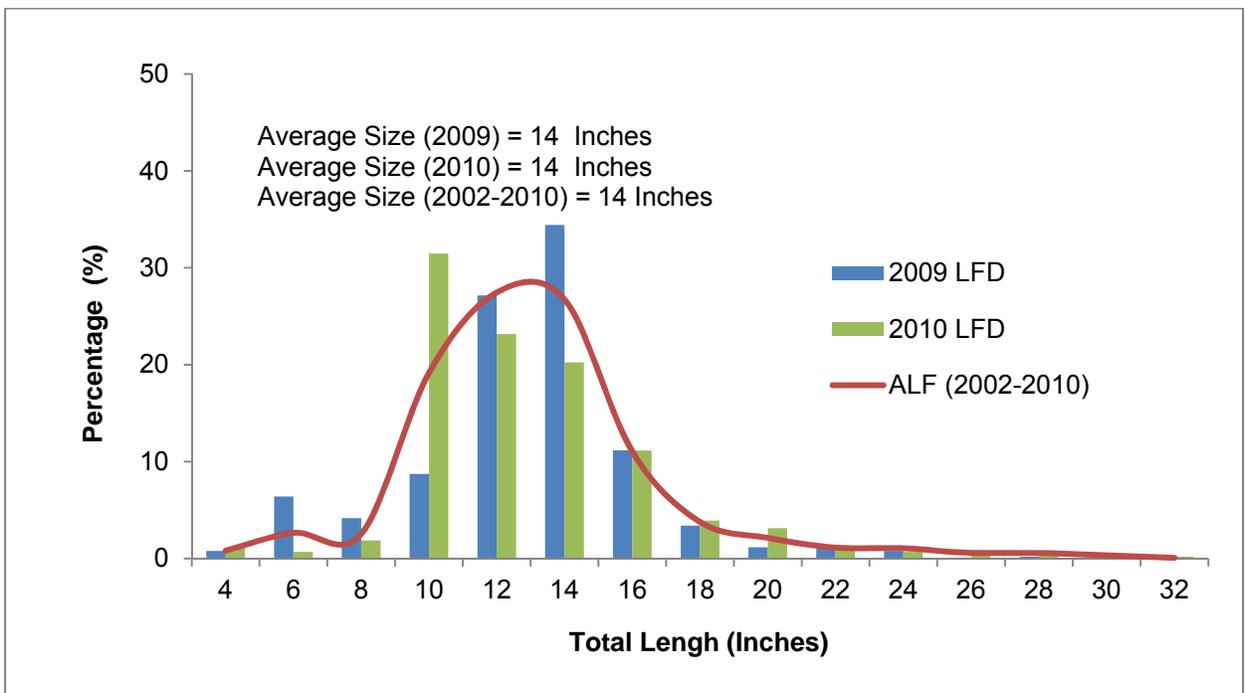


Figure 4. Percent length frequency distribution (LFD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Lake Roosevelt (FDR) 2009 and 2010 compared to the average length frequency (ALF) from all FWIN surveys on FDR from 2002–2010.

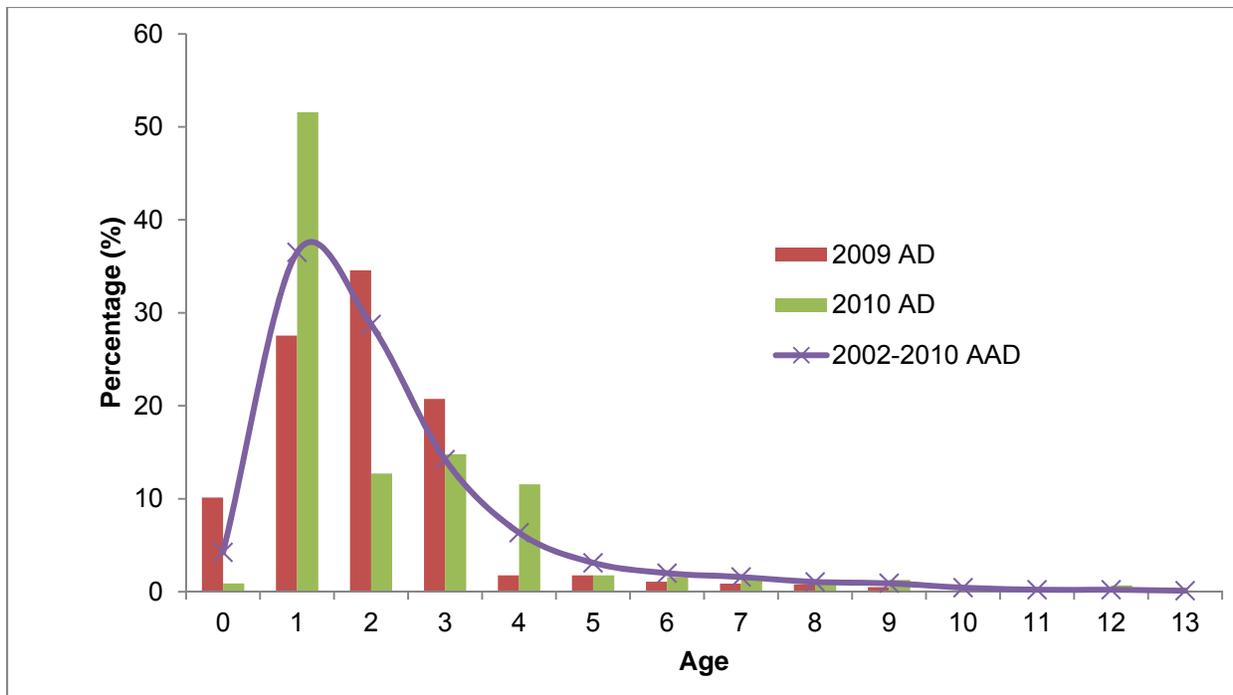


Figure 5. Age distribution (AD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Lake Roosevelt (FDR) 2009 and 2010 compared to the average age distribution (AAD) from all FWIN surveys on FDR from 2002–2010.

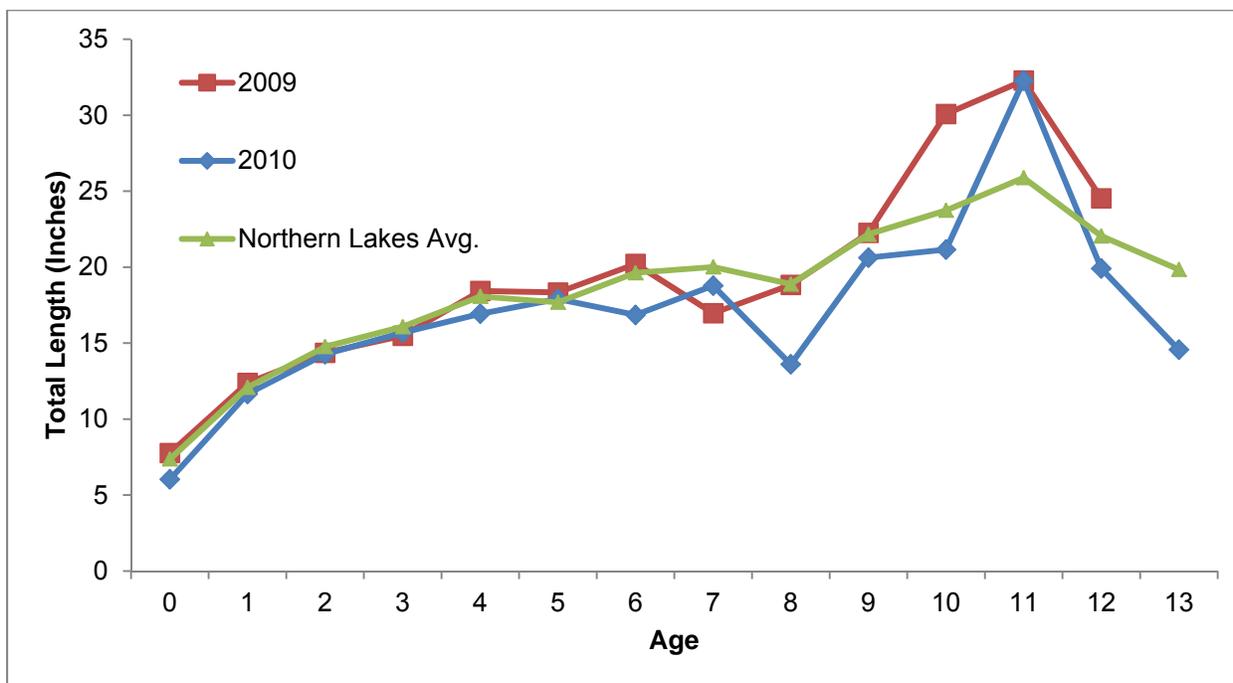


Figure 6. Length-at-age of walleye collected during FWIN on Lake Roosevelt (FDR) in 2009–2010 compared to the Northern Lakes Average from all FWIN Surveys on FDR and Banks Lake 2002–2010.

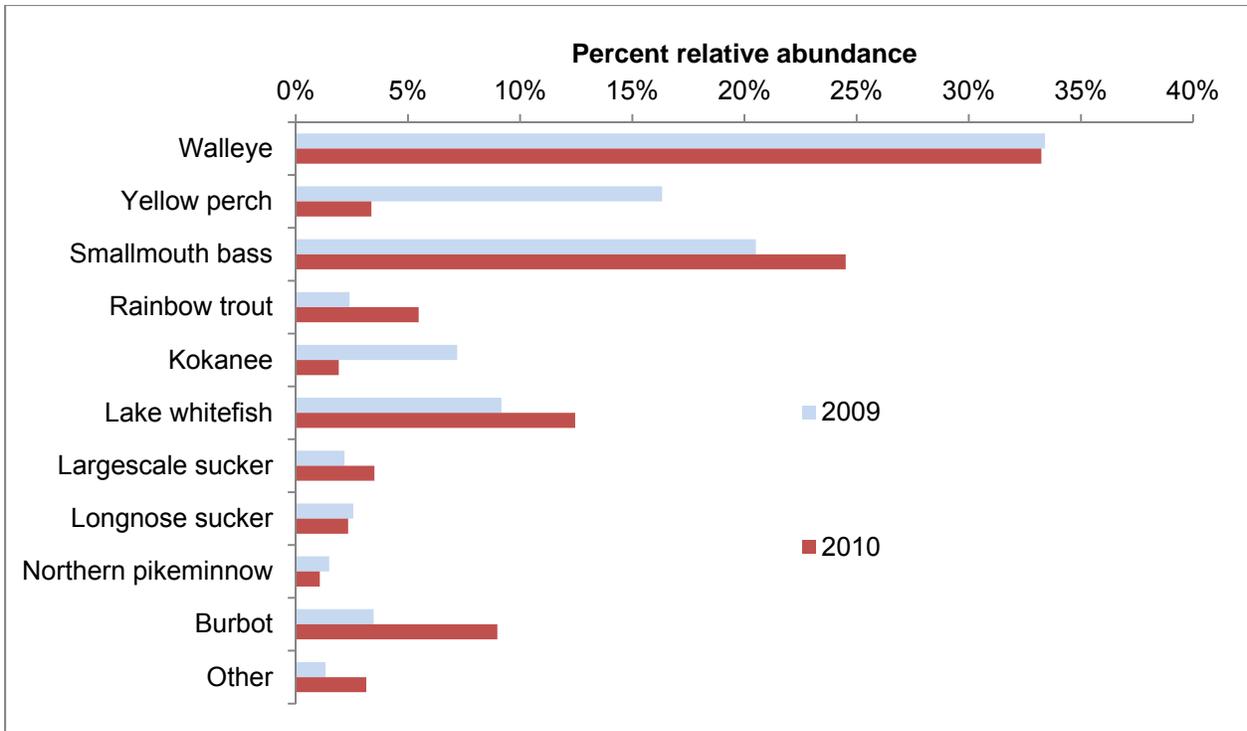


Figure 7. Relative abundance of fishes collected during FWIN on Lake Roosevelt (FDR) in 2009 and 2010.

Banks Lake

The CPUE of walleye in Banks Lake has been low but relatively stable from 2002–2010 with CPUE ranging from 2–4.8 walleye per net (Figure 8). Walleye averaged 16 inches in 2009 and 17 inches in 2010 (Figure 9). These averages are slightly higher than the long-term average of 15 inches and correspond to walleye age 2–4 (Figure 10, 11). Growth of walleye in 2009–2010 was similar to the long term average for Banks Lake and FDR, with the exception of older walleye, (Figure 11). Walleye in Banks Lake typically reach harvestable size (16 inches) by age 3 or 4. In 2009 and 2010 approximately 64 and 51 percent, respectively, of the walleye collected were at least harvestable size. These two years represent the highest proportions of harvestable walleye since 2002 and may be an indication of increased angling opportunity in 2011 and 2012. On average, only 36 percent of the walleye collected from 2002–2010 in Banks Lake were harvestable size and larger.



Besides walleye, numerous other game fish species were collected during our FWIN surveys on Banks Lake. Lake whitefish and yellow perch dominated the catch in both 2009 and 2010 while other species ranged in abundance from 1 to 12 percent of the total catch (Figure 12). Despite their abundance, large size (average weight 2.5 pounds in 2010), and palatability, few anglers exploit lake whitefish in Banks Lake. Lake whitefish are targeted by a small group of dedicated anglers in winter on the ice. Similar to FDR, Banks Lake is an important smallmouth, and largemouth bass fishery hosting several bass tournaments each year. In 2009 and 2010 smallmouth bass collected in FWIN surveys averaged 1.5 and 1.4 pounds respectively. While not known for trophy smallmouth bass Banks Lake hosts a healthy, consistent smallmouth bass fishery. Banks Lake also contains very good opportunities for yellow perch, rainbow trout, black crappie and kokanee.

Banks Lake has numerous access points for launching boats and shore angling along its 25 mile length. The towns of Coulee City and Electric City at its south and north ends, respectively, offer lodging as well as city-owned parks with water access. Steamboat Rock State Park offers camping, trailer and RV hook-ups as well as excellently maintained boat ramps, shore angling and it surrounds the “Devil’s Punch Bowl”, which has very good largemouth bass and black crappie habitat.

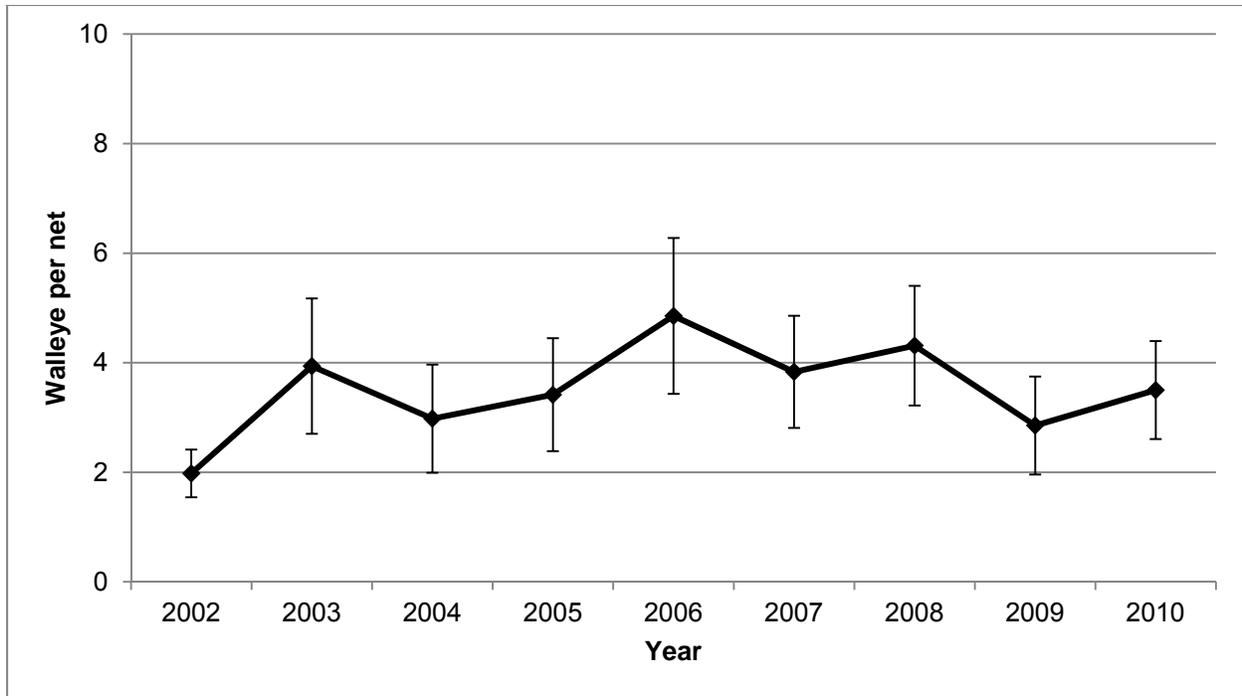


Figure 8. Catch per unit effort (\pm 80% CI) of walleye for all FWIN surveys on Banks Lake from 2002–2010.

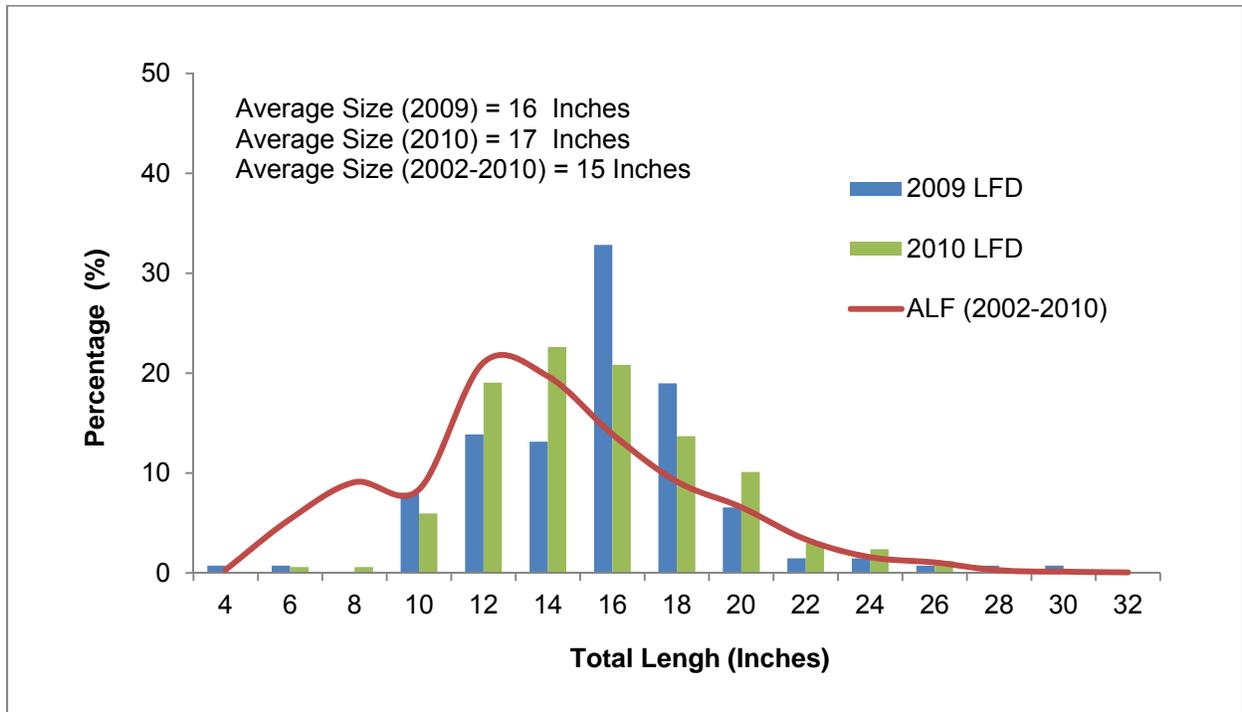


Figure 9. Percent length frequency distribution (LFD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Banks Lake 2009 and 2010 compared to the average length frequency (ALF) from all FWIN surveys on Banks Lake from 2002–2010.

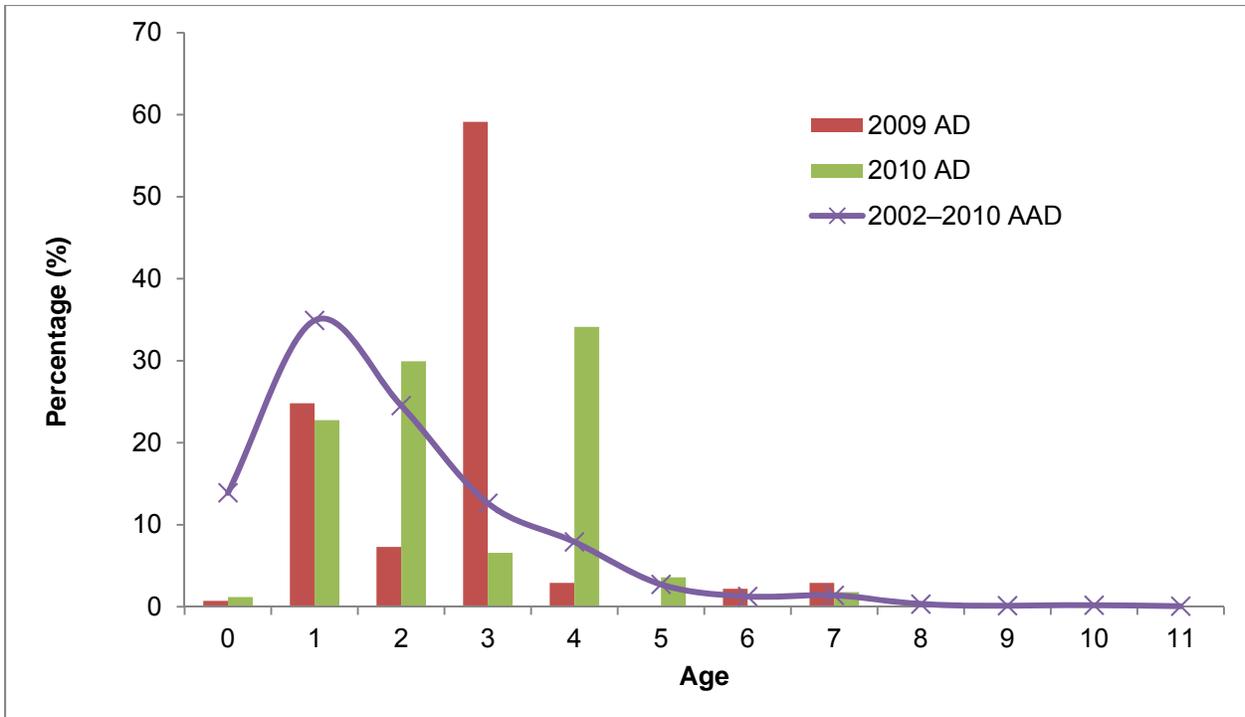


Figure 10. Age distribution (AD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Banks Lake 2009 and 2010 compared to the average age distribution (AAD) from all FWIN surveys on Banks Lake from 2002–2010.

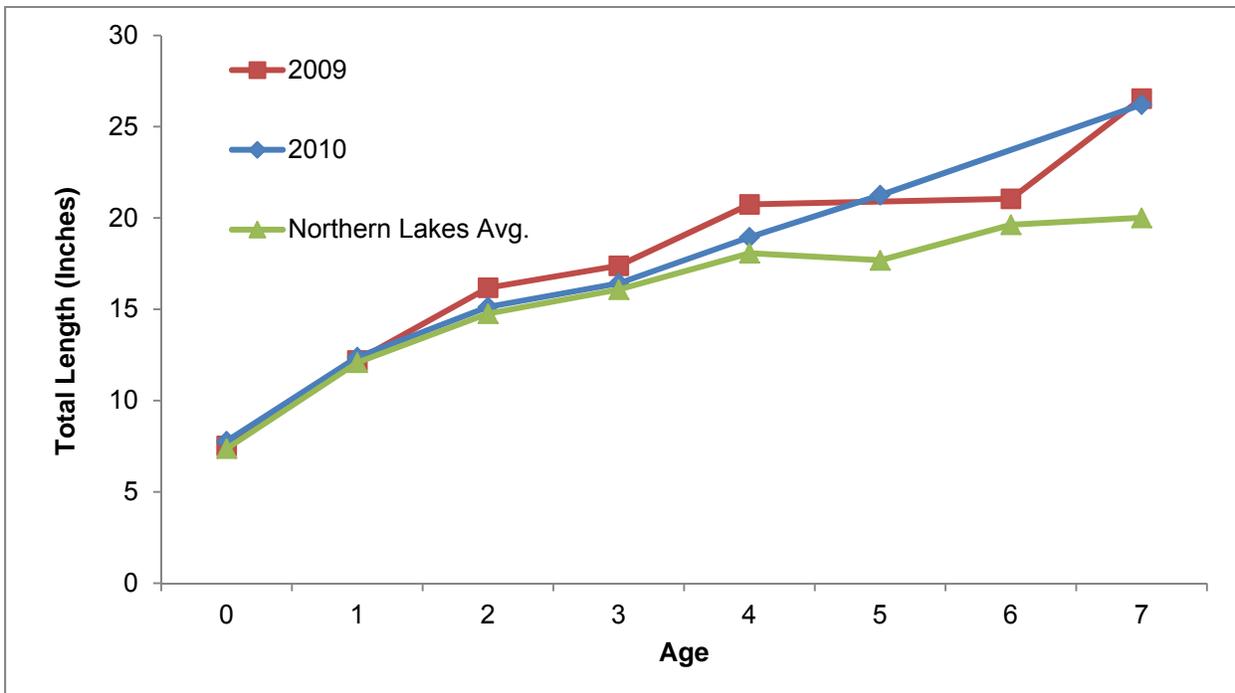


Figure 11. Length-at-age of walleye collected during FWIN on Banks Lake in 2009–2010 compared to the Northern Lakes Average from all FWIN Surveys on FDR and Banks Lake 2002–2010.

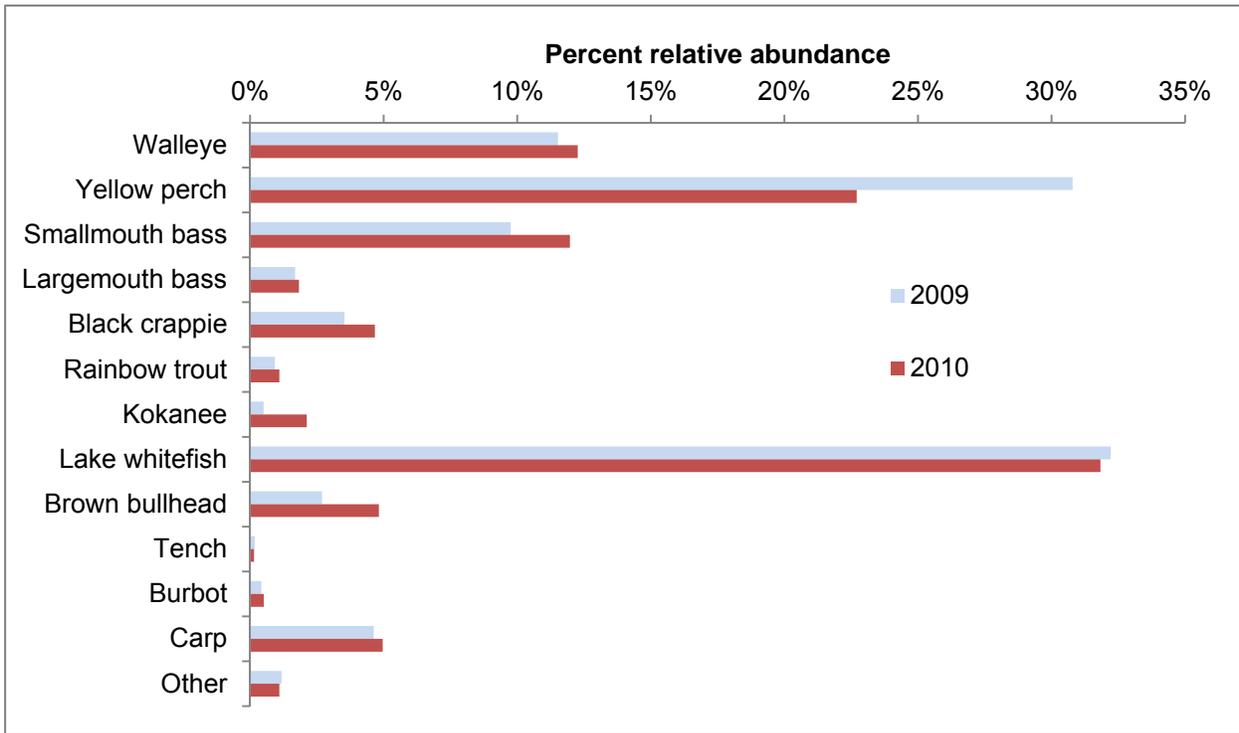


Figure 12. Relative abundance of fishes collected during FWIN on Banks Lake in 2009 and 2010.

Moses Lake

Walleye CPUE in Moses Lake varied considerably from 2002–2010. The CPUE in 2002 was 68 walleye per net, which is the highest CPUE from any FWIN survey in Washington (Figure 13). From 2003–2007 CPUE varied from 32–41 walleye per net, and from 2008–2010 CPUE varied from 19–27 walleye per net. Despite these declines in CPUE, Moses Lake possesses a healthy, abundant walleye population. The length frequency distribution for walleye collected in 2009 showed high abundance of walleye at 6, 14, and 20 inches (Figure 14). This corresponded to age 0, 1 and 3 walleye, respectively. The distribution of walleye in 2010 was more typical with a single peak, representing nearly 50 percent of the catch, at 12–14 inches (age-1 walleye). This should provide angling opportunity for harvestable size walleye in 2011 and 2012. In 2009, age-0 walleye represented 41 percent of the catch, while in 2010 this cohort (now age-1) represented 75 percent of the catch (Figure 15). Growth of walleye in Moses Lake has been consistent since 2002 with fish reaching 16 inches at age-1 or 2 (Figure 16).



In addition to walleye, yellow perch and brown bullhead dominated the catch in both 2009 and 2010 (Figure 17). For years Moses Lake has been a popular walleye and smallmouth bass fishery; however, in recent years Moses Lake has become a well respected largemouth bass fishery with anglers reporting catches of largemouth bass weighing 8–10 pounds. Perch fishing can be quite good on Moses Lake, especially during winter on the ice. A popular spot for ice fishermen is near the I-90 bridge near the Moses Lake city park. In addition, anglers report good springtime trout fishing along the shores of the state ORV park at the south end of the lake. Some anglers also target common carp with both hook and line and bow and arrow. Moses Lake has one of the most abundant common carp populations in the state and they can be both challenging to catch on hook and line and put up a fierce fight.

There are five public boat launches on Moses Lake. The city of Moses Lake offers lodging and two city-owned parks with boat ramps and docks. In addition to water access these parks offer grass day-use areas with picnic tables. Cascade Park also has camping facilities and boat moorage.

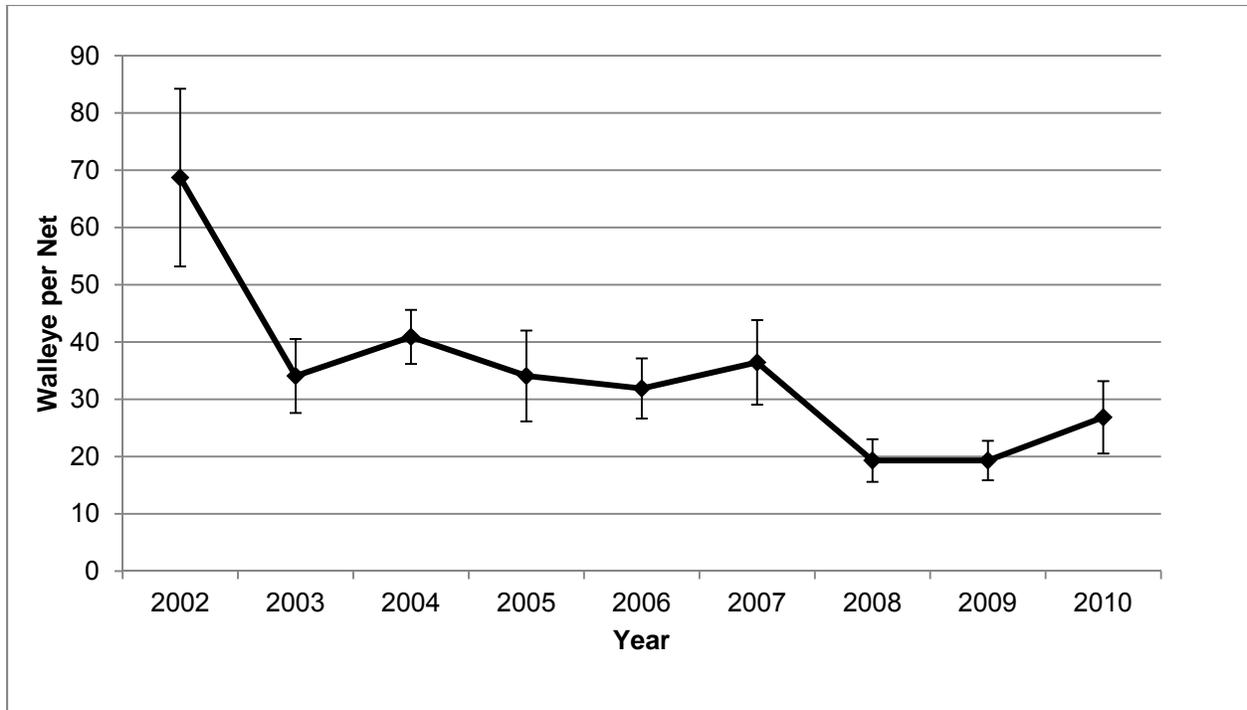


Figure 13. Catch per unit effort (\pm 80% CI) of walleye for all FWIN surveys on Moses Lake from 2002–2010.

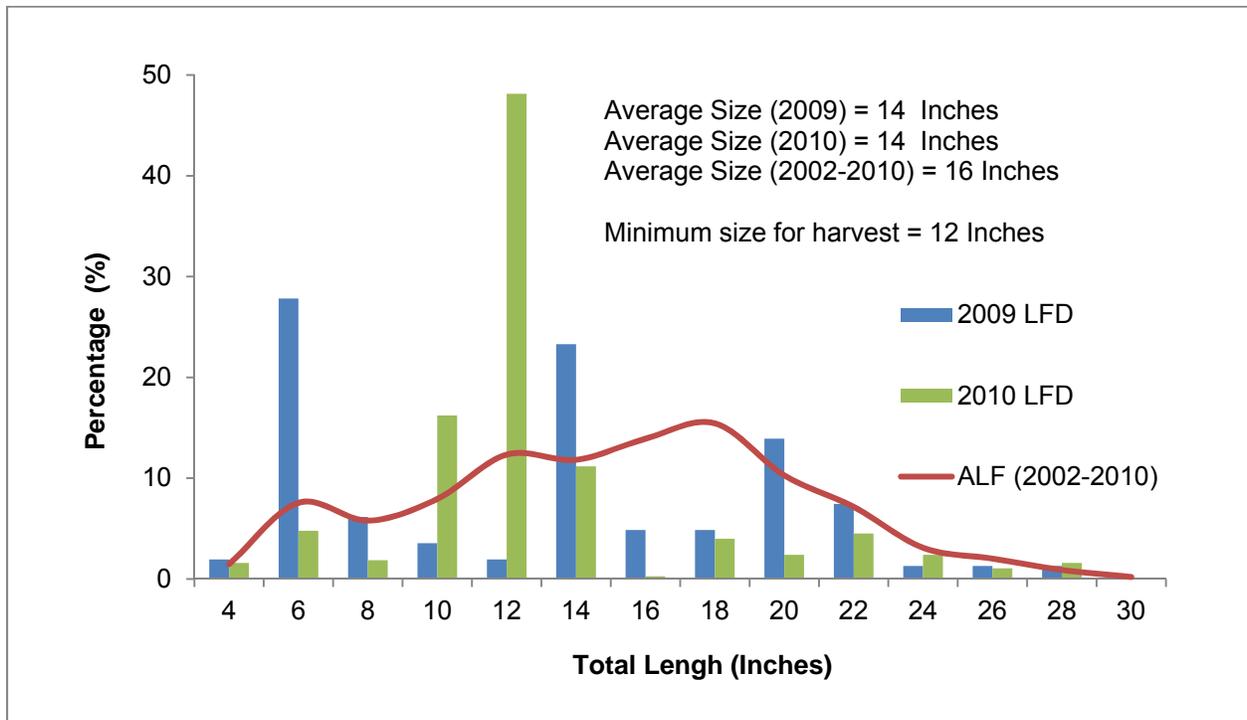


Figure 14. Percent length frequency distribution (LFD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Moses Lake 2009 and 2010 compared to the average length frequency (ALF) from all FWIN surveys on Moses Lake from 2002-2010.

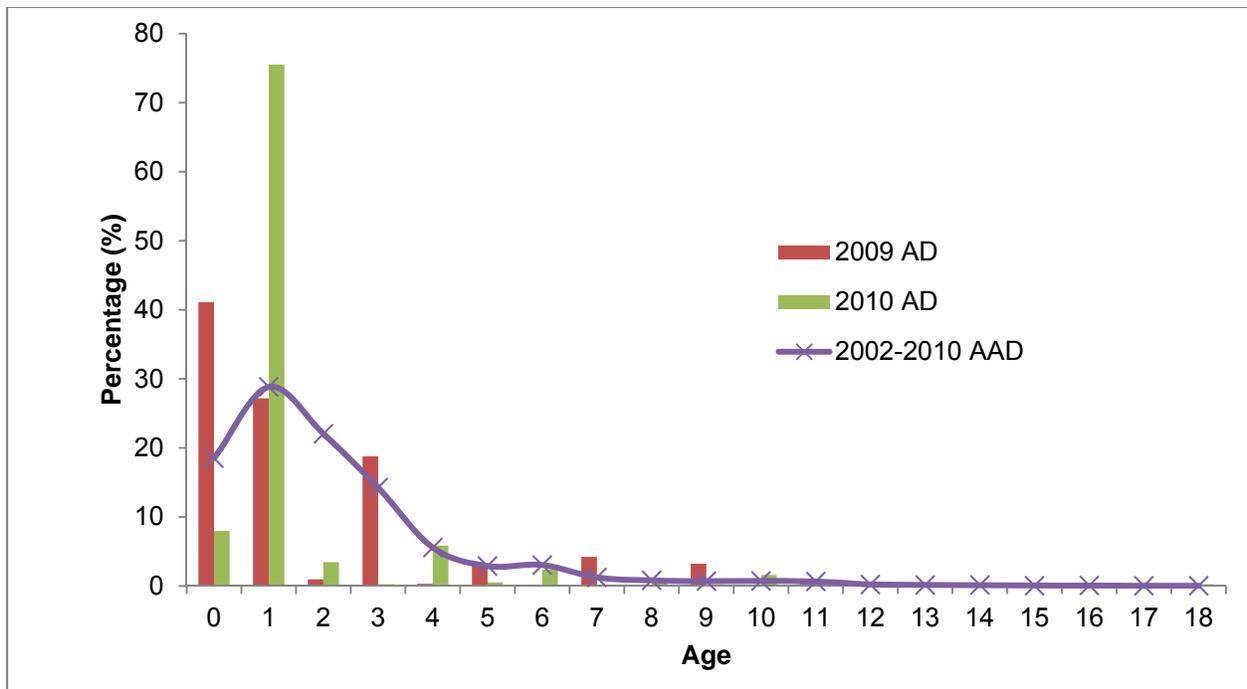


Figure 15. Age distribution (AD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Moses Lake 2009 and 2010 compared to the average age distribution (AAD) from all FWIN surveys on Moses Lake from 2002-2010.

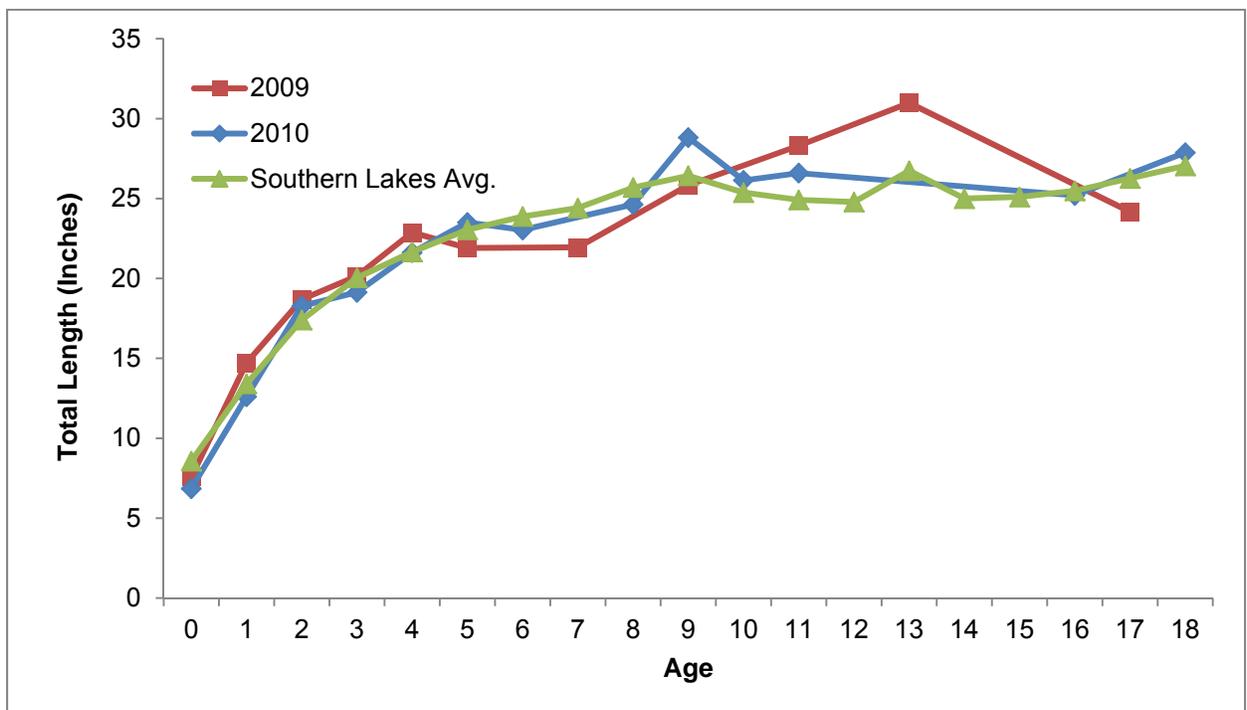


Figure 16. Length-at-age of walleye collected during FWIN on Moses Lake in 2009 and 2010 compared to the Southern Lakes Average from all FWIN Surveys on Moses Lake, Potholes Reservoir, and Scootenev Reservoir 2002-2010.

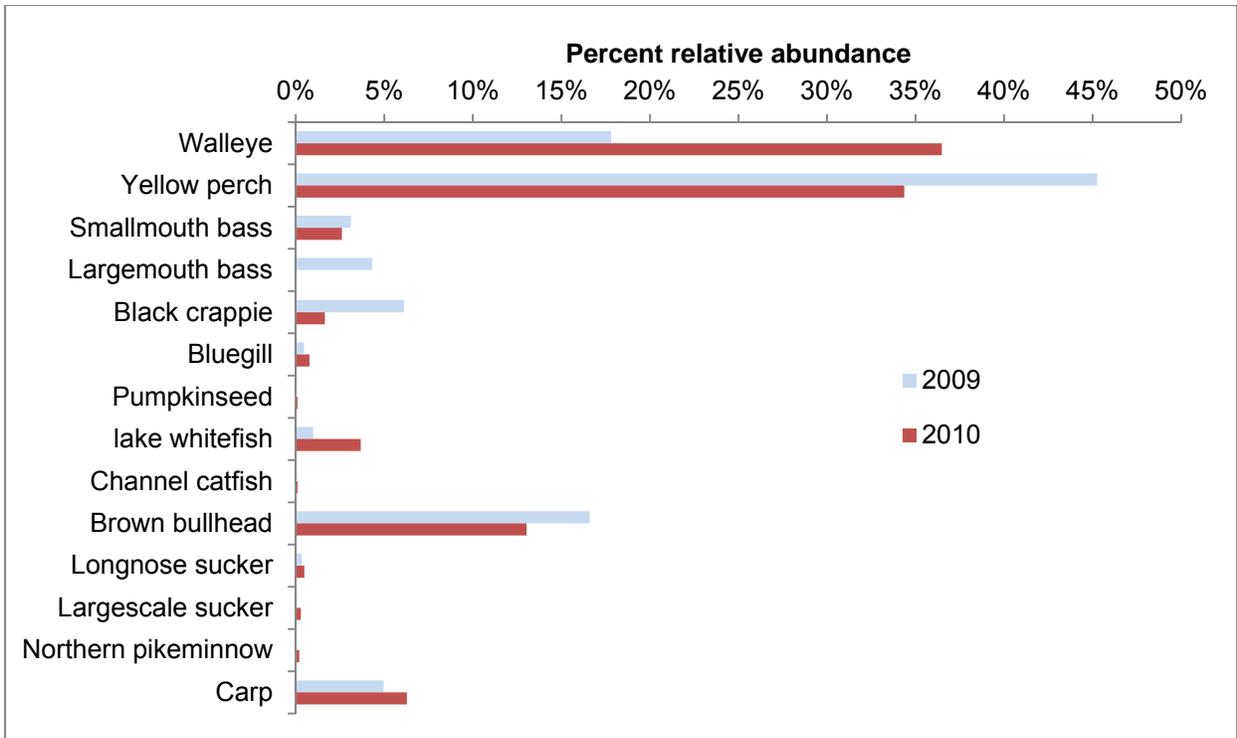


Figure 17. Relative abundance of fishes collected during FWIN on Moses Lake in 2009 and 2010.

Potholes Reservoir

The CPUE of walleye from FWIN surveys on Potholes Reservoir has varied considerably, from the peak in 2002 (40 walleye per net average) to the low of 16 walleye per net in 2005 (Figure 18). The average CPUE for all years (2002–2010) was 23 walleye per net. The average size of walleye collected in 2009 and 2010 was 16 and 18 inches, respectively, (Figure 19) which corresponds to age-2 walleye (Figure 21). In 2009 and 2010 approximately 82 percent of the walleye collected were harvestable size (at least 12 inches) which may be an indication that angler harvest of walleye is low (Figure 19). The abundance of age-1 walleye in this population should be a boon for anglers in 2011 and 2012. Potholes walleye have one of the fastest growth rates in Washington with fish reaching 16 inches between age-1 and 2 (Figure 21).



In addition to walleye, yellow perch and lake whitefish were abundant in our samples. Unfortunately, despite their abundance, large size (average weight 3.4 pounds in 2010), and palatability, few anglers exploit lake whitefish in Potholes Reservoir. Lake whitefish are a popular game fish in the Midwest and is the most economically valuable freshwater species of the Great Lakes where anglers often target them in January and February.

While Potholes Reservoir is widely recognized as a world class walleye fishery it is also one of the most popular bass fisheries (smallmouth and largemouth) in Washington. Smallmouth bass fishing can be very good along the face of O'Sullivan Dam and in Lind Coulee. Excellent largemouth bass fishing can be found in the sand dunes at the north end of the reservoir. Black crappie fishing is popular in the sand dunes of Potholes Reservoir as well as along the docks at Mardon Resort.

Potholes Reservoir is the home of Potholes State Park and Mardon Resort. Both offer water access for boat launching and shore fishing, as well as camping and RV hook-ups. Mardon Resort also offers cabin rental and a store that sells a wide variety of fishing supplies. Both facilities are in close proximity to the desert lakes and chain lakes directly adjacent to the south side of Potholes Reservoir where anglers can find numerous excellent opportunities for walleye and bass fishing as well as trout and panfish. Those lakes are relatively small and offer very good shore access for fishing.

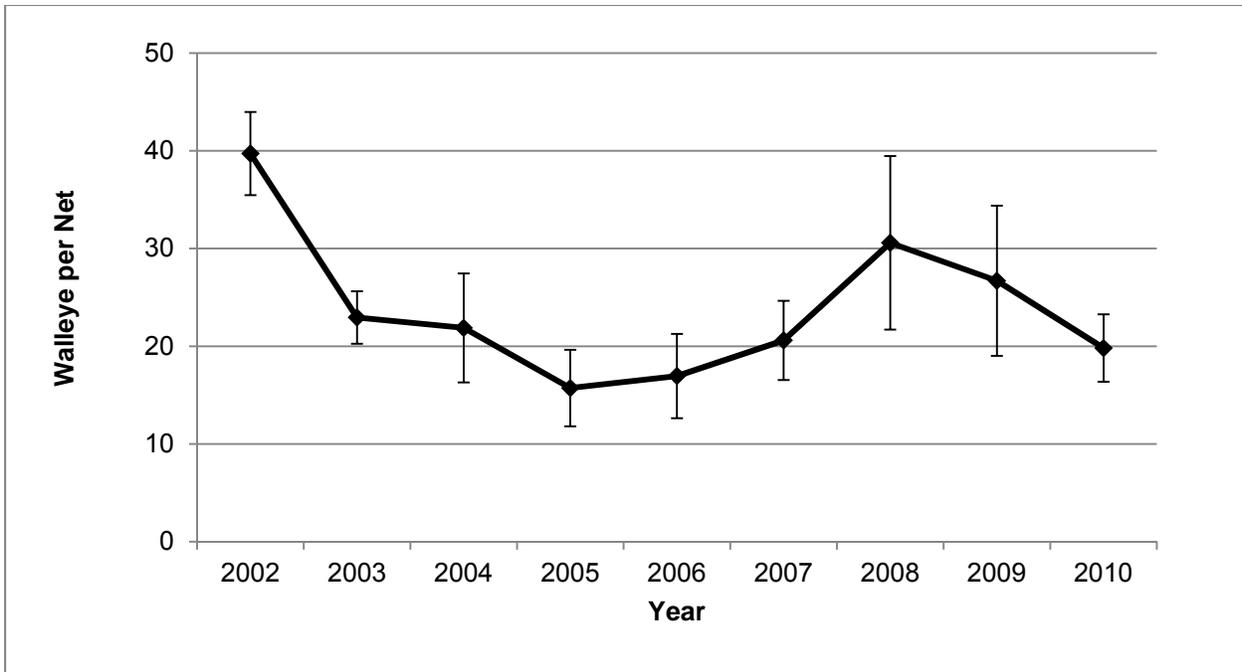


Figure 18. Catch per unit effort (\pm 80% CI) of walleye for all FWIN surveys on Potholes Reservoir from 2002–2010.

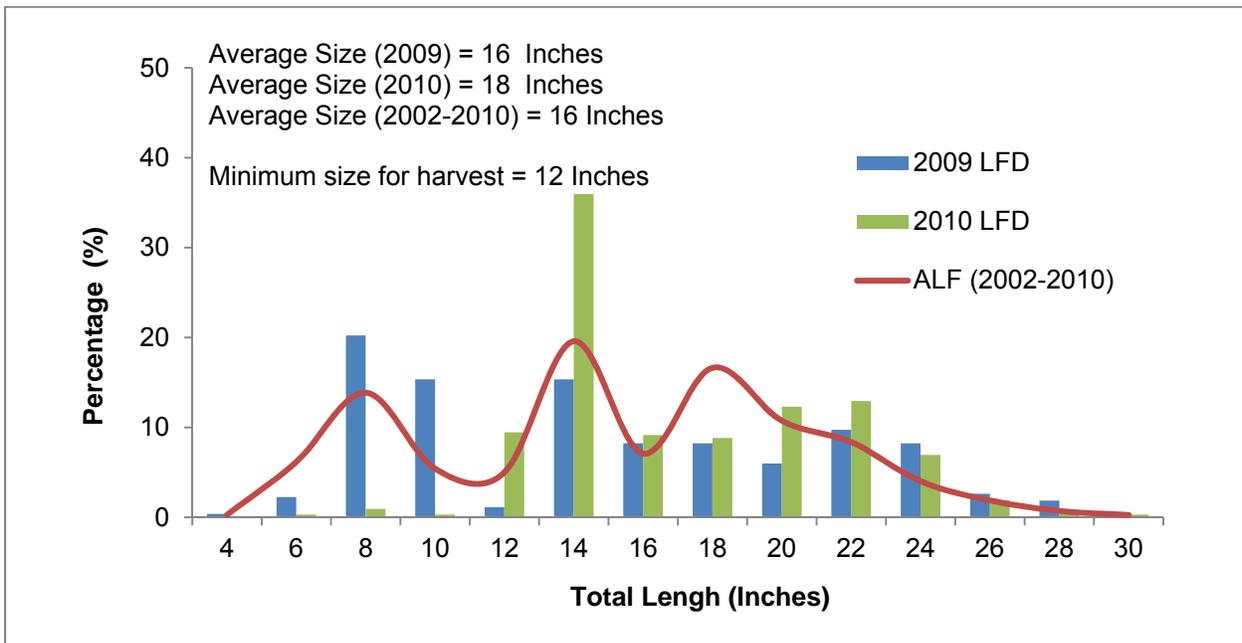


Figure 19. Percent length frequency distribution (LFD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Potholes Reservoir 2009 and 2010 compared to the average length frequency (ALF) from all FWIN surveys on Potholes Reservoir from 2002–2010.

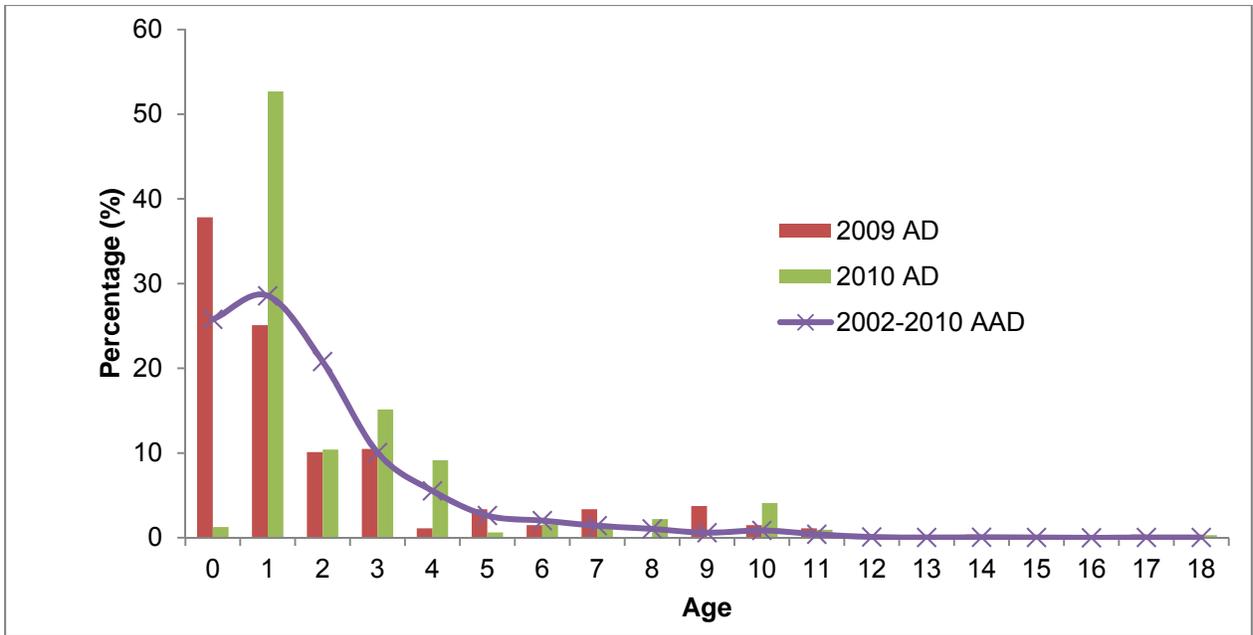


Figure 20. Age distribution (AD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Potholes Reservoir 2009 and 2010 compared to the average age distribution (AAD) from all FWIN surveys on Potholes Reservoir from 2002–2010.

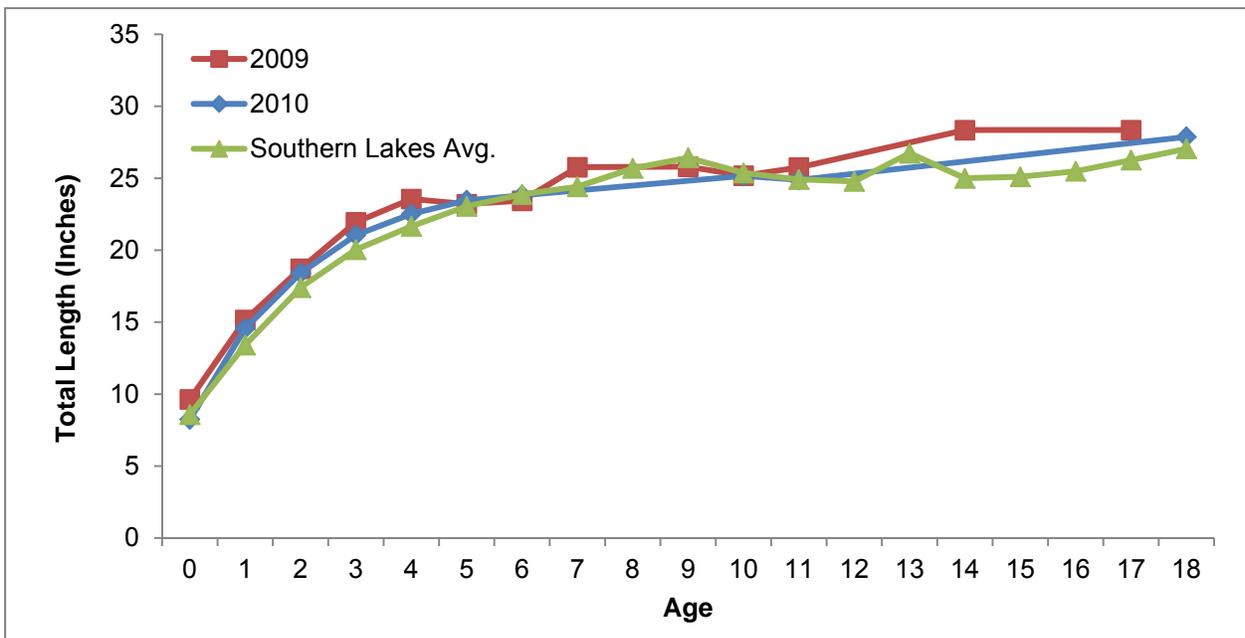


Figure 21. Length-at-age of walleye collected during FWIN on Potholes Reservoir in 2009 and 2010 compared to the Southern Lakes Average from all FWIN Surveys on Moses Lake, Potholes Reservoir, and Scootney Reservoir 2002–2010.

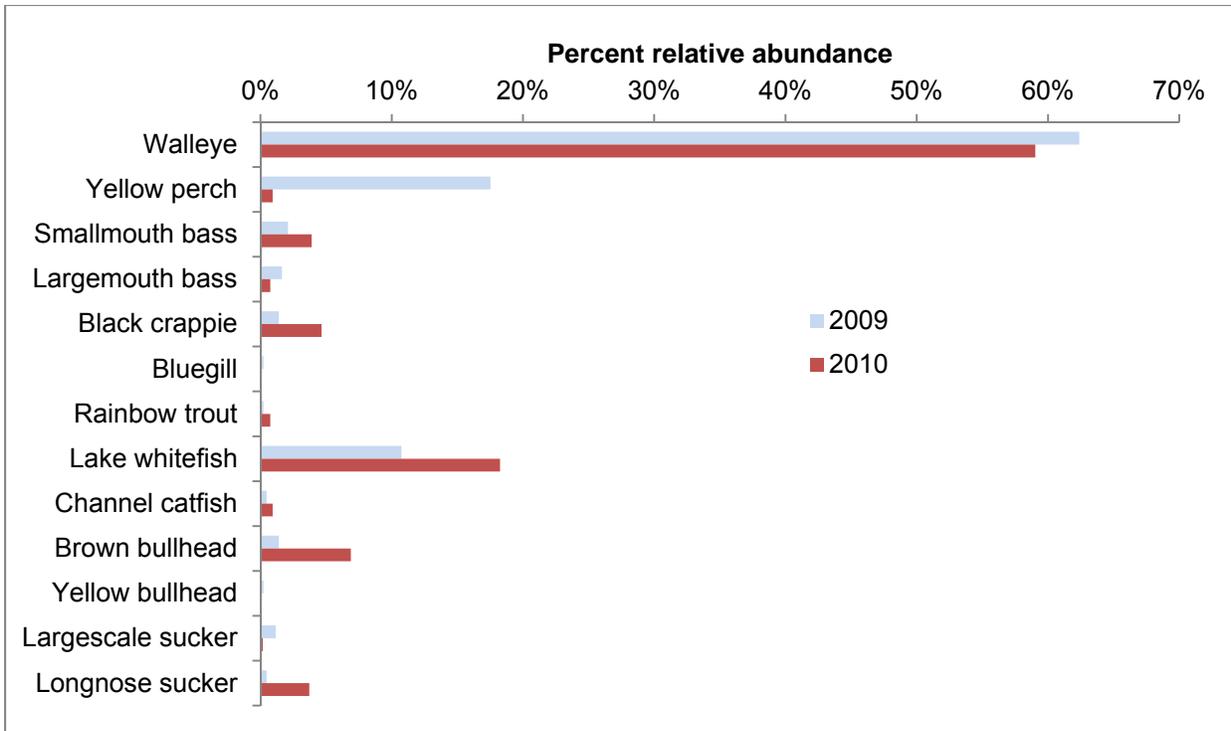


Figure 22. Relative abundance of fishes collected during FWIN on Potholes Reservoir in 2009 and 2010.

Scooteney Reservoir

The CPUE of walleye in Scooteney Reservoir has been the most stable of the three southern FWIN lakes (Moses, Potholes, Scooteney) with abundance estimates ranging from 19–26 walleye per net (Figure 23). The average size of walleye collected in 2009 and 2010 was 15 and 14 inches, respectively, with most fish between 12 and 18 inches (Figure 24). This corresponds to walleye from one to three years of age (Figure 25 and 26). Age distributions from 2009 and 2010 followed long-term averages with most fish (~ 80%) being either age-1 or age-2 (Figure 25). On average, 29 percent of the walleye collected during FWIN surveys (02-10) were harvestable (≥ 16 inches). This trend continued in 2009 (30%) and 2010 (25%).



In addition to walleye, yellow perch dominated the catch in both 2009 (37%) and 2010 (55%). Abundant yellow perch in walleye lakes has been linked to lower catch rates for walleye anglers. This is likely due to the fact that yellow perch are favored forage of walleye and when walleye are satiated with perch they are less likely to take an angler's offering. Eleven other species were collected and none represented more than 4 percent of the total catch, although there are very good opportunities for some larger yellow perch, along with smallmouth and largemouth bass, black crappie and, once again, lake whitefish.

Water access is plentiful at Scooteney Reservoir, with abundant shore fishing and several boat ramps, including a double paved ramp with a launching float at the Bureau of Reclamation park. That park also has a meticulously maintained grassy day-use area with picnic tables, overnight camping and RV hook-ups.

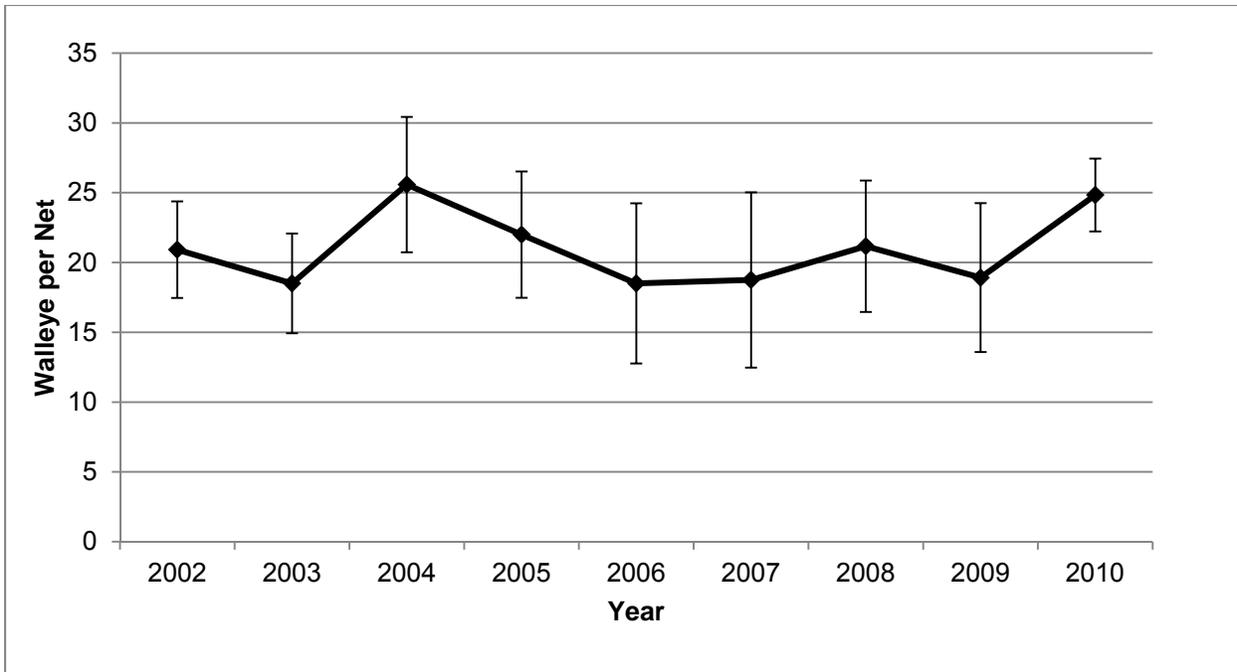


Figure 23. Catch per unit effort (\pm 80% CI) of walleye for all FWIN surveys on Scootenev Reservoir from 2002–2010.

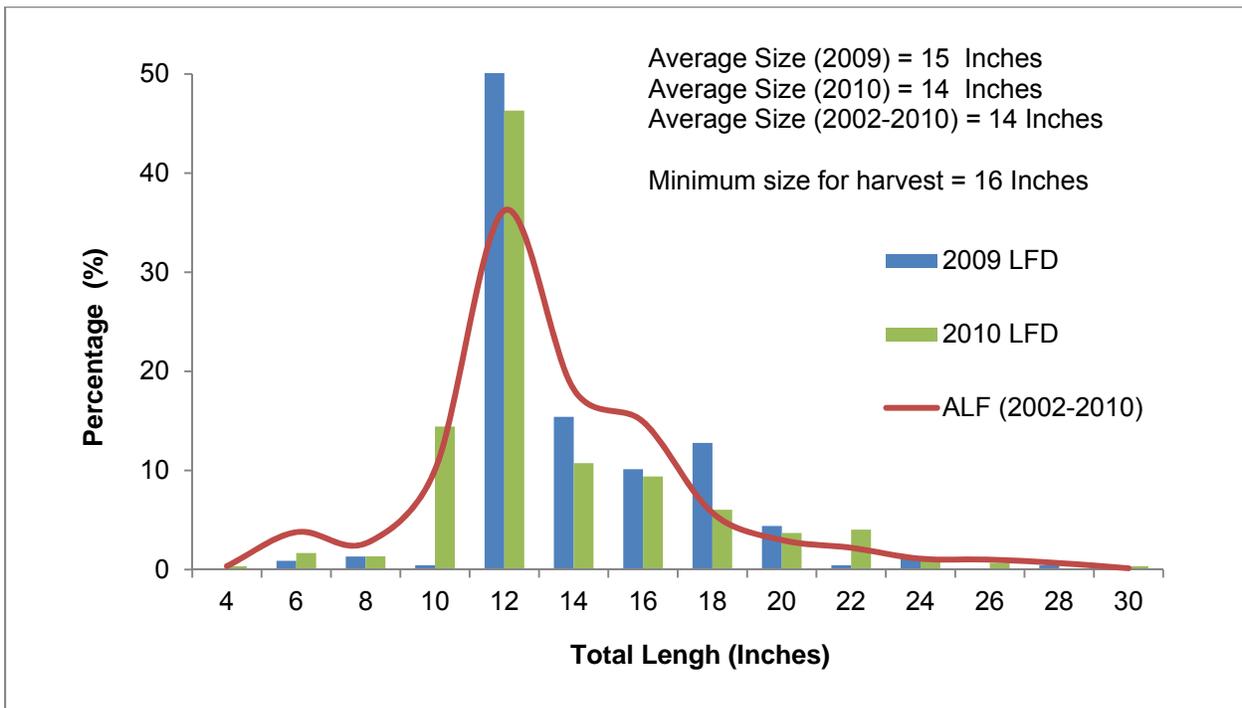


Figure 24. Percent length frequency distribution (LFD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Scootenev Reservoir 2009 and 2010 compared to the average length frequency (ALF) from all FWIN surveys on Scootenev Reservoir from 2002-2010.

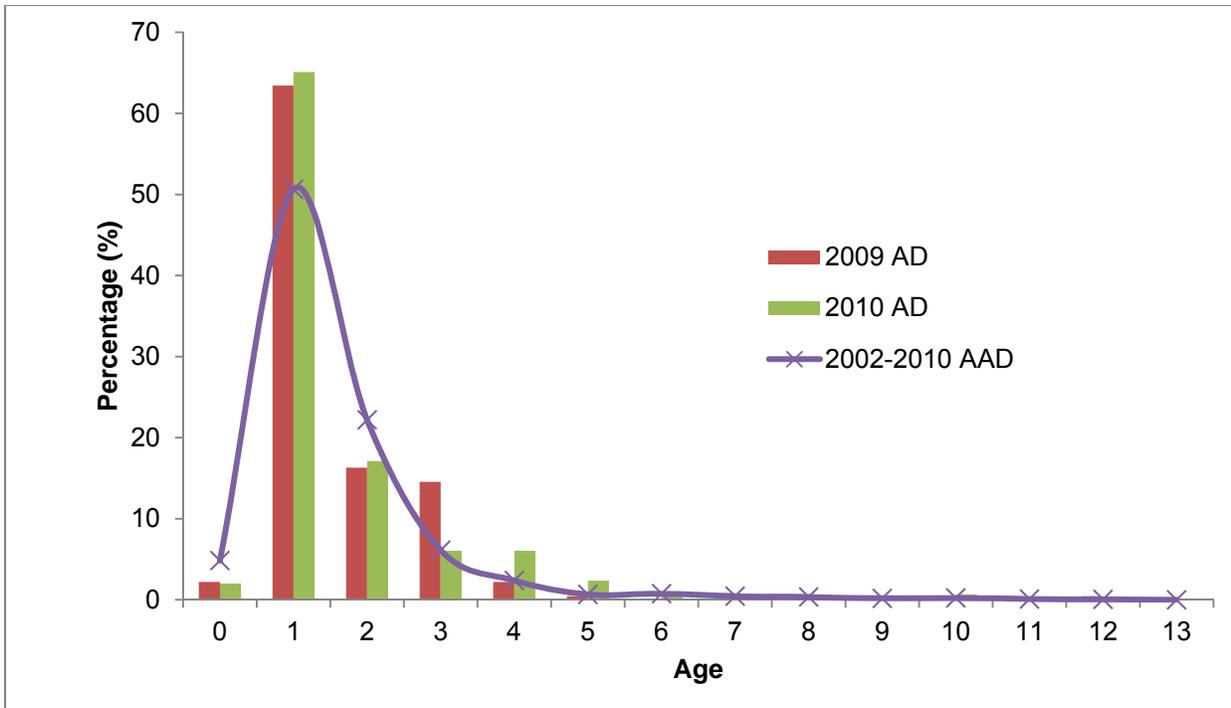


Figure 25. Age distribution (AD) of walleye collected during FWIN on Scootenev Reservoir 2009 and 2010 compared to the average age distribution (AAD) from all FWIN surveys on Scootenev Reservoir from 2002-2010.

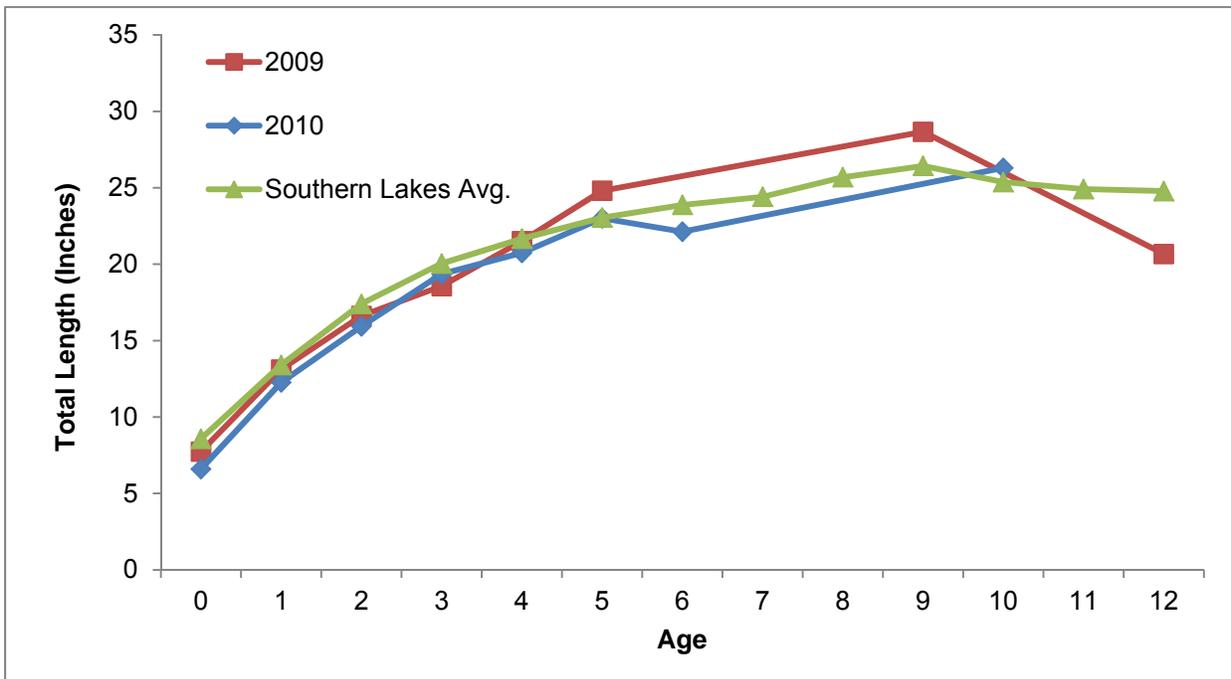


Figure 26. Length-at-age of walleye collected during FWIN on Scootenev Reservoir in 2009 and 2010 compared to the Southern Lakes Average from all FWIN Surveys on Moses Lake, Potholes Reservoir, and Scootenev Reservoir 2002-2010.

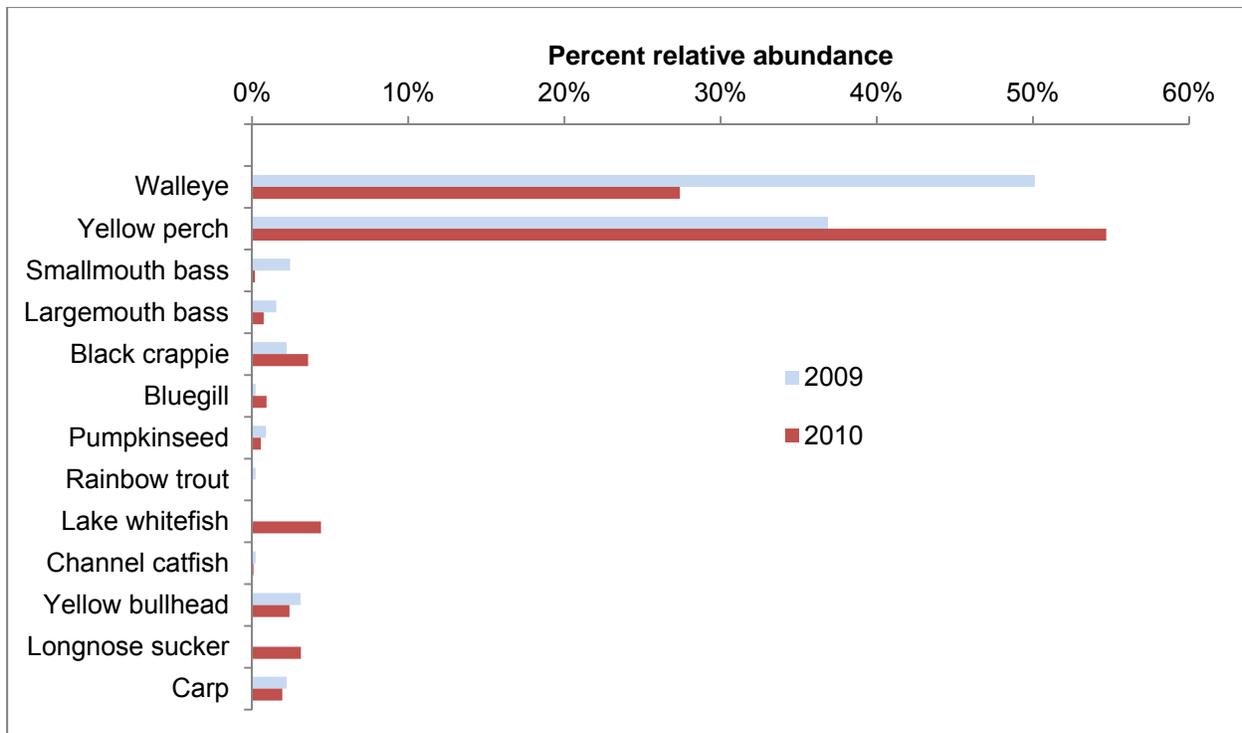


Figure 27. Relative abundance of fishes collected during FWIN on Scooteney Reservoir in 2009 and 2010.

Frequently Asked Questions

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife fisheries biologists, along with Spokane and Colville tribal biologists have been conducting FWIN surveys on the five lakes mentioned in this report since 2002. Despite the longevity of this project there is a significant amount of misunderstanding concerning what FWIN is, and why we conduct FWIN surveys annually. Below I address the most prevalent questions anglers have concerning FWIN.

Question 1. Are FWIN nets set in the “good locations” to catch the largest number of fish?

Answer: We set FWIN nets randomly in order to reduce any bias that could affect catch rates. We randomly select sites on each lake and then randomly select a depth stratum in which to set the net. These depth strata are 6-15 feet deep and 15+ feet deep.

Question 2. Is the WDFW killing too many walleye in Lake X with their nets?

Answer: In most cases we collect 300 or fewer walleye from each lake. This represents much less than 1% of the entire population of walleye in the lake and is the equivalent of 300 anglers harvesting one more walleye over the course of a year.

Question 3. Is the FWIN sampling used to see what the walleye are eating?

Answer: Our FWIN sampling is conducted to monitor changes in relative abundance of walleye from year to year, walleye growth, condition, and fecundity. While we do get an indication of what walleye are eating while collecting other information we do not make note of it.

If you have questions about our FWIN surveys or would like additional copies of this report please contact the following regional warmwater fisheries biologists.

Lake Roosevelt and Scooteney Reservoir

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Spokane Valley, WA 99216-1566
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Banks Lake, Moses Lake, and Potholes Reservoir

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