



Wisconsin Department Of Natural Resources

Fisheries Information Sheet

North Branch Crawfish River

Columbia County

2025

Introduction

The North Branch Crawfish River is a 31-mile, low gradient (3.25 feet per mile) major tributary to the Crawfish River located within the Rock River drainage in Columbia County, Wisconsin. The river flows northeast then southeast to join the mainstream south of the Fall River Millpond (Lazy Lake), just below the Village of Fall River. The North Branch Crawfish River offers anglers a diverse action fishery that is easily accessible near Brayton Park, Fall River Village Park and numerous road crossings. Hook and line fishing is open all year on the North Branch Crawfish River for all fish species except muskellunge, lake sturgeon, trout, paddlefish and threatened or endangered fish. The North Branch Crawfish River follows the general inland fishing regulations (Table 5).

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) conducted a wadeable smallmouth bass electrofishing survey of the North Branch Crawfish River at County Highway D in Fall River, Columbia County on August 27, 2025. A stream barge electrofishing unit was used to survey a total of 800 meters (0.5 mile) at this location. All fish species were collected along a 380-meter station downstream of the County Highway D bridge. Gamefish such as largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, northern pike and rock bass were collected along a 420-meter gamefish only station upstream of the County Highway D bridge. Gamefish were measured to the nearest tenth of an inch while other species were counted.

Smallmouth Bass

A total of 490 smallmouth bass were sampled and lengths ranged from 2.1 to 17.3 inches with an average length of 5.1 inches (Figure 1). The catch rate for smallmouth bass was 980 fish per mile (Table 1).

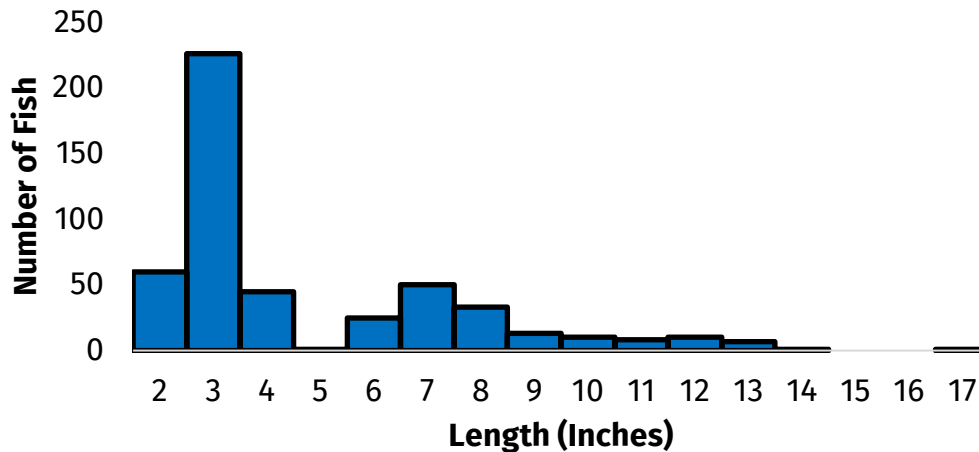


Figure 1. Length-frequency distribution of smallmouth bass sampled during the 2025 electrofishing survey of the North Branch Crawfish River, Columbia County, Wisconsin.

Table 1: Smallmouth bass catch rates (fish per mile), number of young of year (YOY; < 5"), quality size ($\geq 11"$) fish and preferred size ($\geq 14"$) fish and flow rates in cubic feet per second (cfs) collected in surveys of the North Branch Crawfish River, Columbia County, from 2017-2025.

Year	2017	2019	2021	2024	2025
Fish Per Mile	550	1,074	114	168	980
YOY < 5"	136	102	14	66	662
Quality Size $\geq 11"$	33	39	4	3	27
Preferred Size $\geq 14"$	2	15	0	1	2
Flow (cfs)	17.2	16.3	2.5	15.5	20.8

Largemouth Bass

A total of 113 largemouth bass were sampled and lengths ranged from 2.9 to 14.9 inches with an average length of 4.7 inches (Figure 2). The catch rate for largemouth bass was 226 fish per mile (Table 2).

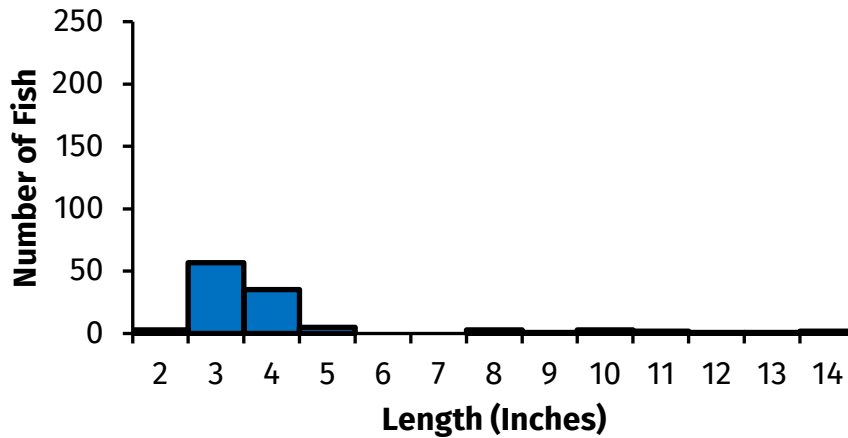


Figure 2. Length-frequency distribution of largemouth bass sampled during the 2025 electrofishing survey of the North Branch Crawfish River in Columbia County, Wisconsin.

Table 2: Largemouth bass catch rates (fish per mile), number of young of year (YOY; < 6"), quality size ($\geq 12"$) fish and preferred size ($\geq 15"$) fish and flow rates in cubic feet per second (cfs) collected in surveys of the North Branch Crawfish River, Columbia County, from 2017-2025.

Year	2017	2019	2021	2024	2025
Fish Per Mile	18	24	124	59	226
YOY < 6"	12	2	120	28	200
Quality Size $\geq 12"$	0	1	0	1	4
Preferred Size $\geq 15"$	0	0	0	0	0
Flow (cfs)	17.2	16.3	2.5	15.5	20.8

Northern Pike

A total of 27 northern pike were sampled and lengths ranged from 7.2 to 22.9 inches with an average length of 17.2 inches (Figure 3). The northern pike catch rate was 54 fish per mile (Table 3).

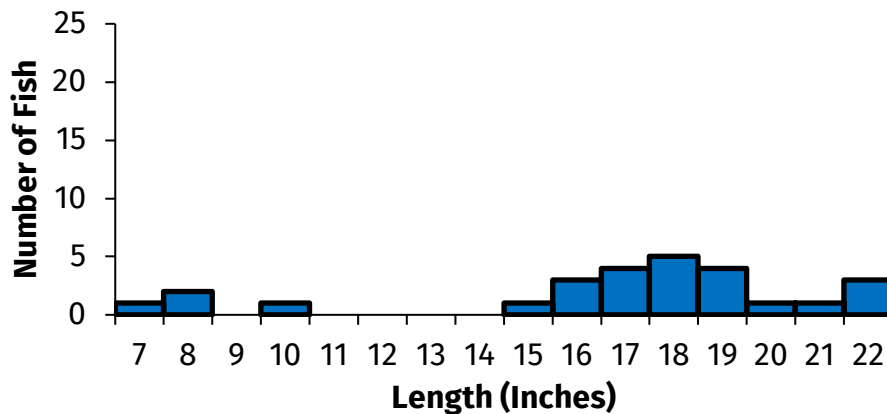


Figure 3. Length- frequency distribution of northern pike sampled during the 2025 electrofishing survey of the North Branch Crawford River in Columbia County, Wisconsin.

Table 3: Northern Pike catch rates (fish per mile), number of quality size (≥ 21 ") fish, preferred size (≥ 28 ") fish and flow rates in cubic feet per second (cfs) collected in surveys of the North Branch Crawford River, Columbia County, from 2017-2025.

Year	2017	2019	2021	2024	2025
Fish Per Mile	8	6	14	44	54
Quality Size ≥ 21 "	1	2	1	3	4
Preferred Size ≥ 28 "	0	1	0	0	0
Flow (cfs)	17.2	16.3	2.5	15.5	20.8

Rock Bass

A total of 19 rock bass were sampled and lengths ranged from 1.9 to 9.3 inches with an average length of 5.6 inches (Figure 4). The rock bass catch rate was 38 fish per mile (Table 4).

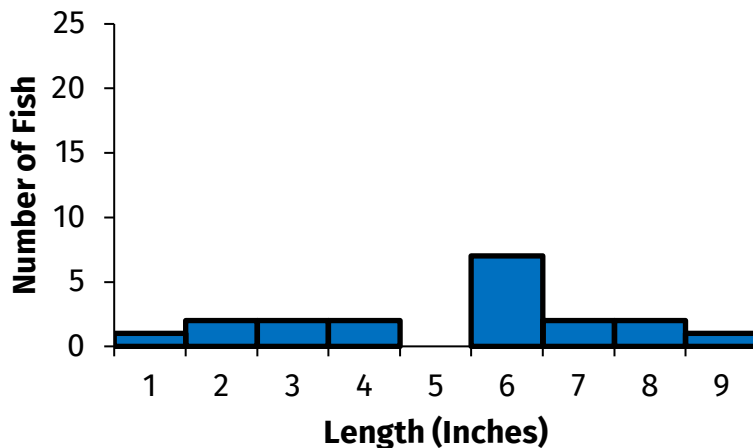


Figure 4. Length-frequency distribution of rock bass captured during the 2025 electrofishing survey of the North Branch Crawfish River in Columbia County.

Table 4: Rock bass catch rates (fish per mile), number of quality size ($\geq 7''$) fish, preferred size ($\geq 9''$) fish and flow rates in cubic feet per second (cfs) collected in surveys of the North Branch Crawfish River, Columbia County, from 2017-2025.

Year	2017	2019	2021	2024	2025
Fish Per Mile	84	190	156	44	38
Quality Size $\geq 7''$	NA	25	39	6	5
Preferred Size $\geq 9''$	NA	0	1	1	1
Flow (cfs)	17.2	16.3	2.5	15.5	20.8

Other Species

A total of 19 fish species were sampled during the 2025 wadeable smallmouth bass electrofishing survey of the North Branch Crawfish River. Other species sampled included black bullhead, blackstripe topminnow, bluegill, bluntnose minnow, central mudminnow, central stoneroller, common carp, common shiner, creek chub, golden shiner, green sunfish, hornyhead chub, tadpole madtom, white sucker and yellow bullhead (Table 6).

Summary

Smallmouth bass abundance and size structure increased substantially in 2025 compared to 2024. For smallmouth bass, there appears to be a positive correlation between flow rate and catch rates (Figure 5). As flow rates increase, so does smallmouth bass catch rate. More water in the system allows for more fish to use the suitable habitat that becomes available. Largemouth bass abundance also increased in 2025 compared to 2024, while size structure increased slightly. The increase in abundances for both smallmouth and largemouth bass can be attributed to strong recruitment of young of the year (YOY) fish in 2025. The 2025 northern pike catch rate increased slightly, while size structure remained similar to 2024. Healthy populations of both largemouth bass and northern pike are found in Lazy Lake directly upstream of the survey area which most likely contribute to the populations of these two species in this section of the North Branch Crawfish River. Rock bass abundance and size structure remained similar from 2024 to 2025.

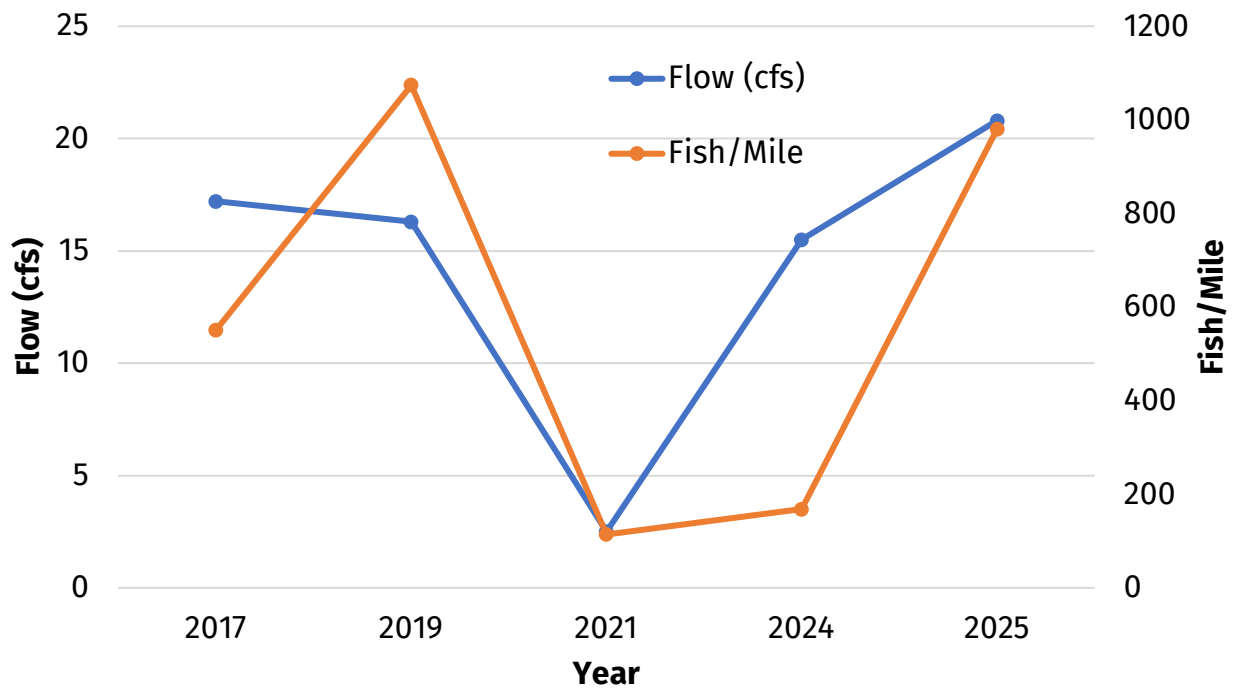


Figure 5. Linear comparison of flow rates in cubic feet per second (cfs) and catch rates (fish per mile) of smallmouth bass in survey years 2017, 2019, 2021, 2024 and 2025.

Table 5. General fishing regulations for the North Branch Crawfish River in Columbia County, Wisconsin.

Fish Species	Open Season	Daily Limit	Minimum Length
Largemouth bass and smallmouth bass	Open all year	5 in total	14 inches
Northern pike	Open all year	2	26 inches
Panfish	Open all year	25	None
Walleye	Open all year	3	15 inches

Table 6. Summary of species, total sampled, catch rate, length range and average length sampled during the 2025 electrofishing survey of North Branch Crawfish River at County Highway D in Columbia County, Wisconsin.

Species	Total Sampled	Catch Rate (Fish/Mile)	Length Range (Inches)	Average Length (Inches)
Golden shiner	1,028	2,056	NA	NA
Smallmouth bass	490	980	2.1-17.3	5.1
Common shiner	305	610	NA	NA
White sucker	127	254	NA	NA
Largemouth bass	113	226	2.9-14.9	4.7
Bluegill	101	202	NA	NA
Northern pike	27	54	7.2-22.9	17.2
Central stoneroller	23	46	NA	NA
Green sunfish	19	38	NA	NA
Rock bass	19	38	1.9-9.3	5.6
Yellow bullhead	19	38	NA	NA
Common carp	15	30	NA	NA
Black bullhead	12	24	NA	NA
Hornyhead chub	11	22	NA	NA
Creek chub	4	8	NA	NA
Tadpole madtom	2	4	NA	NA
Blackstripe topminnow	1	2	NA	NA
Bluntnose minnow	1	2	NA	NA
Central mudminnow	1	2	NA	NA

Acknowledgements

For answers to questions about fisheries management activities on the North Branch Crawfish River, contact:

Casey Weber – Fisheries Biologist

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

N3344 Stebbins Rd.

Poynette, WI 53955

(608) 635-6956

casey.weber@wisconsin.gov