

**Hearns Pond**  
53.4 acres  
Seaford, Delaware

***Fish Community***

Hearns Pond was drawn down several times in the last decade including in 2002 for installation of a new water control structure and again in 2012 for dam repair. Following each draw down the pond was restocked with gamefish including Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Black Crappie, Redear Sunfish and Golden Shiner. A local bass club, Backlash Bass Anglers, constructed and installed a number of fish habitat units prior to refilling of the pond in 2012. This greatly enhanced fish habitat within the pond.



*Fish habitat being installed prior to refilling of the pond in 2012*

The Division assessed the fish community via electrofishing sampling in the spring of 2013. The abundance of Largemouth Bass only slightly declined from sampling conducted in 2008 and was consistent with the average catch rate for ponds in Sussex County. A variety of size groups were observed with an abundance of sub-legal sized bass (<12" total length). By 2015, many of these fish should have grown to legal size. The proportion of larger fish in the population is well balanced with the occasional bass >20". Anglers reported catching 20" and 21.5" bass in 2012 and 2013 respectively as part of Delaware's Sportfish Tournament Live Release Program (<http://de.gov/livereleaseprogram>). Relative weight (measure of condition or 'plumpness') was good for all size classes. This indicates ample prey resources or foraging efficiency which could be a factor of the pond being drawn down in 2012. Reduced water levels concentrate fish into a smaller area of the pond and can allow a predatory species, such as bass, to more efficiently cull overabundant prey. Bluegill were extremely abundant prior to the drawdown and are now at a more sustainable level, although they are still the most abundant panfish in the pond. A variety of size groups were present but there were few larger (>7") fish. Relative weight was very good for all size classes. The Black Crappie population has declined in abundance with few size groups represented in the 2013 sample. Relative weight was poor and possibly a sign of a stunted population or competition for resources. Further study is needed to determine the potential cause. Other species collected or observed during 2013 sampling include: Redear Sunfish, White Perch, Gizzard Shad, Golden Shiner, Brown Bullhead, and American Eel. Redear Sunfish were stocked to increase predation on a snail species that was host to a parasite that was infecting Bluegill. The Bluegill collected in 2013 did not exhibit signs of being infected with the parasite. The Redear population is comprised primarily of 6-8" fish with very low relative weights. It is possible that prey resources have declined or that Redear are not competing well with other species for resources.

***Vegetation***

Hearns Pond does not have a lot of aquatic vegetation except for Spatterdock which occurs primarily in the back half of the pond (both tributaries). This large floating leaved plant is beneficial to the fish community because it provides shelter and foraging habitat. In the past, duckweed was common over much of the pond surface. It has been replaced in recent years by planktonic algae blooms which are single celled plants that cause the water to appear green or bluish green. Floating mats of filamentous algae also occur but have not been so excessive that it impedes fishing and boating activities.

***Special Conditions***

Dam repair and upgrades to the boat ramp and parking area will temporarily require closure to public use. The project will be initiated in 2015, therefore, check the Division's website (<http://www.fw.delaware.gov>), look for press releases, or contact the Fisheries Section at 739-9914 for status of the project. The special Largemouth Bass slot limit is no longer in effect. The statewide minimum size of 12" and creel of 6 bass per day is in effect.

**(see Pond Map on next page)**

