

Out in the Open

Lake Owassa With Its Fast Growing Pickerel and Big Bass Deserves Attention

By HENRY SCHAEFER

YOU may expect to find bottom dwelling species of fish biting at almost any spot on 264-acre Lake Owassa in Sussex County, for this lake has neither thermocline nor oxygen deficiency in its depths. But the lake is not very deep, 18 feet being the deepest spot found by the State Lake Survey. Lake Owassa is another of those rather numerous Jersey lakes on which the fish management man is tempted to think rather strongly in terms of pickerel. They grow large there very fast. Both largemouth and smallmouth bass grow well in the lake also. Fishing, however, has grown worse over the years.

According to Robert Hayford, chief of the State Lake Survey, who spent Summers at the lake as a boy, bass fishing success seems to have been in a steady decline.

It is a lake worth serious study, however, and sensible management should bring about an improvement in the fishing. Perhaps in Owassa, night fishing should be permitted, for the lake is known to be inhabited by some huge bass which have shown little inclination to strike—at least during the daytime.

This is what Dr. James R. Westman of Rutgers University, technical consultant to the State Lake Survey, has to say about Owassa:

"Pickerel are common in Lake Owassa and have a very excellent growth rate. They reach approximately 16 inches in length during their third Summer of growth and are now protected up to 15 inches under the new fresh-water regulations or at the approximate length when they begin to spawn for the first time.

"Smallmouth bass in Lake Owassa are not uncommon and have a fair to good rate of growth. The nature of this lake makes it suitable for a limited quantity of smallmouth bass. Largemouth bass have a good rate of growth and are common in the lake—reaching approximately 26 inches during their eighth year of life. In Lake Owassa, as in most other New Jersey lakes, trouble seems to be experienced in getting the very large largemouth bass to take the hook.

"Bluegills, pumpkinseeds and calico bass are common in the lake and have a good rate of growth. At least 20 species of fish inhabit the lake including the following: Yellow perch, smallmouth bass, catfish, red-breasted sunfish, long-eared sunfish, largemouth bass, pumpkinseed, bluegill, pickerel, golden shiner, tadpole madtown, chubsucker, white catfish, mud minnow, alewife, bridled shiner, common sucker, calico bass, northern black catfish, American eel.

Lake Owassa

(Sussex County)

Fourth in the series of New Jersey fishing lakes in The Newark Sunday News, Owassa is "very excellent" one for growing pickerel. In addition it has largemouth and smallmouth bass as well as popular pan fishes.

The lake has a maximum depth of 18 feet with plenty of oxygen all the way down to the bottom to support fish life. Owassa is one of the lakes on which a 15-inch minimum length will be in effect for pickerel this season.

