

# 2023 CRAPPIE TOURNAMENT SUMMARY



FISHERIES BUREAU



MISSISSIPPI WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, AND PARKS

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Jackson, MS 39211



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In 2011, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) biologists began to archive information from statewide crappie tournaments. These data should help with managing one of Mississippi's most popular sport fish, as well as provide anglers with insights of what to expect at different lakes for future tournaments.

The hours required to catch a 2 lb. or larger crappie is "N2". Like golf, a lower N2 score is better. In an event where no fish  $\geq$  2 lbs. were caught, N2 was assigned a value of 1000 hours, which was averaged with other N2 values for that lake.

A "tournament" was identified as such if daily results (or pro and amateur divisions) were reported separately or combined; ex. a two-day event with both days results combined was one tournament. Most events were one day and teams were comprised of one or two anglers. Hours fished per event varied but were standardized to an 8-hour day for comparisons.

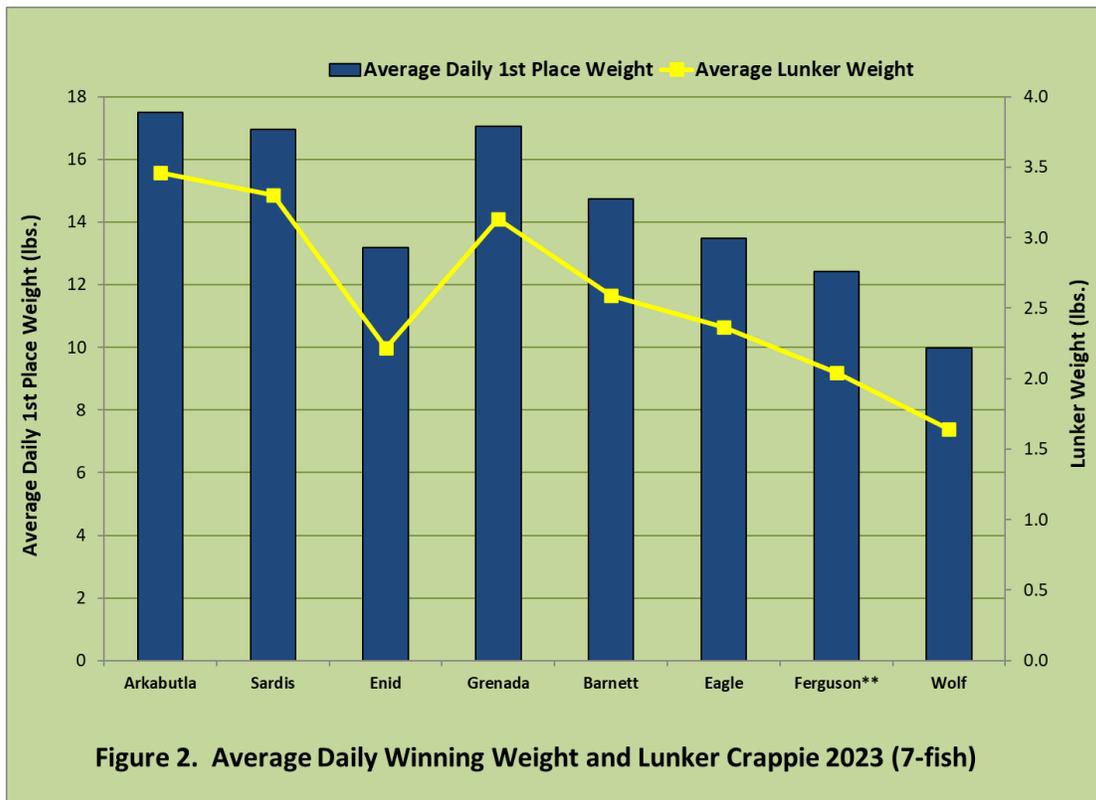
Three of four national tournament trails fished in Mississippi in 2023. Rules varied between trails. Most events had a 7-crappie daily limit per team. One trail and one local event had a 5-crappie daily limit. One trail started their season with Major League Fishing (MLF) style rules that weighed all crappie caught and released over 1 lb., then changed to three time periods per day, one big fish per period weighed, with the overall big fish winning.

MDWFP obtained results from sixteen 7-fish events, three 5-fish events, three 1-fish events, and one MLF-style event (twenty-three total) at eight lakes from six sources (see acknowledgements). No results were available from the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. The most notable findings in 2023 were:

- A total of 1,671 crappie anglers fished 13,999.8 hours. Grenada had six reported tournaments, 26% of all events. Other lakes had one to five events. Anglers know there are good and bad fishing days - lakes with few tournaments may not accurately reflect the quality of those fisheries.
- Most tournaments were held in the spring and the fall (Figure 1).



- Most took place in the summer months; warm water is sometimes associated with increased fish mortality in the summer period.
- Statewide metrics (7-fish events, Table 1) returned mixed results when comparing 2022 to 2023. Statewide average numbers per day, pounds per day, and daily first place weights increased in 2023. Average crappie and lunker weights in 2023 were similar to 2022. However, in 2023 it took 46 more hours of fishing to catch a crappie  $\geq 2$  lbs., despite the use of live sonar technology.
- The average daily first place weights ranged from 17.50 lbs. at Arkabutla Lake to 9.99 lbs. at Wolf Lake (Figure 2). Average lunker weights ranged from 3.46 lbs. at Arkabutla Lake to 1.64 lbs. at Wolf Lake (Figure 2). Both lakes only had one event



- Half of the top ten, heaviest daily first place limits, came from Lake Grenada (Table 2); no limits averaging  $\geq 3$  lbs. per fish were caught at any lake. The flood control reservoirs were "readjusting" to normal (instead of high) water levels, plus anglers had been harvesting big fish from the abundant forage available during high water years (2018 - 2021).

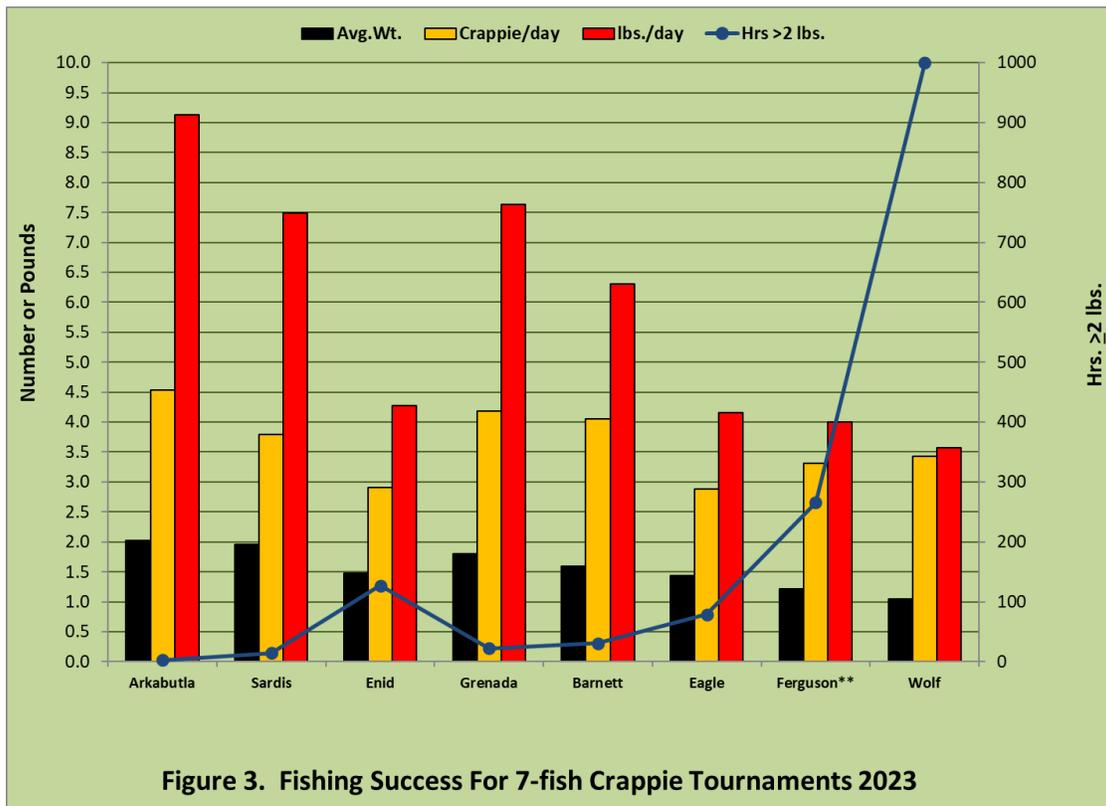
<u>Lake</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Tournament</u>	<u>Daily 1<sup>st</sup> Place Weight (lbs.)</u>
Grenada	March 10	Crappie Masters	20.64
Grenada	March 11	Crappie Masters	19.52
Sardis	February 4	Crappie Masters Trails	17.74
Arkabutla	March 25	Crappie Masters Trails	17.50
Grenada	March 18	Magnolia Crappie Club	17.43
Barnett	April 15	Crappie Masters	17.06
Grenada	October 6	Crappie Masters	16.56
Sardis	February 18	Magnolia Crappie Club	16.16
Grenada	September 16	Magnolia Crappie Club	15.35
Barnett	April 15	Magnolia Crappie Club	15.25

- The top 10 big fish came from 4 lakes (Table 3); Sardis had the largest fish. All big fish were > 3 lbs. in 2022, but only 60% were > 3 lbs. in 2023.

**Table 3. Top 10 Heaviest Daily Big Fish Weights from 2023.**

<u>Lake</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Tournament</u>	<u>Big Fish Weight (lbs.)</u>
Sardis	February 4	Crappie Masters Trails	3.72
Grenada	March 11	Crappie Masters	3.66
Arkabutla	March 25	Crappie Masters Trails	3.46
Grenada	March 10	Crappie Masters	3.37
Grenada	March 18	Magnolia Crappie Club	3.22
Grenada	October 6	Crappie Masters	3.06
Sardis	February 18	Magnolia Crappie Club	2.88
Barnett	April 14	Magnolia Crappie Club	2.87
Barnett	April 15	Magnolia Crappie Club	2.66
Grenada	September 16	Magnolia Crappie Club	2.60

- The average (all events for a lake) big fish weight ranged from 3.46 lbs. at Arkabutla to 1.64 lbs. at Wolf (Figure 2, Table 4); both lakes only had one event. The statewide average big fish in 2023 was slightly smaller than 2022 (Table 1). With the popularity of live sonar, these statistics will be carefully watched for trends.
- Average crappie weight ranged from 2.02 lbs. at Arkabutla Lake to 1.05 lbs. at Wolf Lake (Figure 3, Table 4). The average number of fish caught per angler per day was highest at Arkabutla (4.53) and lowest at Eagle (2.88). Average pounds caught per angler per day were highest at Arkabutla (9.13 lbs.) and lowest at Wolf (3.58 lbs.).



- The number of hours required to catch a crappie  $\geq 2$  lbs. (N2, Figure 3, Table 4) was lowest at Arkabutla Lake (3 hours) and highest at Wolf Lake (1000 hours = none). Again, both lakes only had one tournament, so these results may not be representative of these fisheries.

\*\* Lakes Ferguson, Lee (both MS), and Chicot (AR) were included in this event.

- Arkabutla Lake ranked first overall and first in all categories (Table 4). A sinkhole at the base of the dam resulted in the lake being drawn down. Angler access was lost by June, and the water level was kept low to relieve pressure on the dam. It will likely be several years before it is repaired and refilled.
- Five fish limit tournaments were compared (Table 5). Barnett, Sardis, and Grenada ranked first through third, respectively, in all categories. The Grenada event restricted anglers to trolling crankbaits. Live sonar was not allowed, and fishing was limited to only six hours.
- The MLF-style, 2-day event at Grenada weighed and immediately released 1,896 crappie totaling 2,852.8 lbs. (average weight 1.51 lbs.). Individual big

fish were not recorded. The winning team landed 329 fish weighing 489.3 lbs. (about one crappie every three minutes). The second-place team "only" landed 177 fish. The advantage of live sonar and very high catch rates prompted other tournament anglers to demand a change in the event's format.

- The heaviest average lunker weights at big fish tournaments came from Sardis (2.65 pounds, 2 events) and Barnett (2.43 pounds, 1 event).
- N2 is a good indicator of big fish abundance. Arkabutla Lake ranked first in N2, first overall, and first in all categories (Table 4), indicating abundant large fish. Barnett ranked fourth in N2, fourth overall, and fourth in all but one category, indicating above average numbers of larger fish. Wolf's high N2 and rank at the bottom in all categories but number per day indicated moderate abundance of smaller fish and few larger fish.
- Grenada ranked second overall (Table 4) despite its high fishing pressure. "Ferguson" ranked next to last; however, it is unknown if that truly represents Ferguson since three lakes could be fished in that event. Lower scores for the Delta fisheries (Eagle, Ferguson, and Wolf) suggest some factor or factors (ex. non-native fish competition, overharvest, turbidity, pollution, etc.) may be limiting fish size and abundance.

More reported events on more lakes would allow MDWFP to better compare and monitor Mississippi's crappie fisheries. Detecting trends in these fisheries is becoming more critical for a variety of reasons, including: improved angling technology, increasing fishing pressure, and declining habitat in aging lakes.

So, how good is crappie fishing in Mississippi? Compared to bass fisheries (relative to their respective world record weights), a state average 2.59-pound big fish (white crappie) would equal a 11.11-pound largemouth bass. A state average 14.42-pound, 7-crappie tournament limit would equal a 44.18 pound, 5-bass tournament limit (an 8.84-pound average).

Since tournament anglers weigh in their largest crappie, their results differ from the catches of average crappie anglers. This report augments data from other MDWFP surveys (creel, electrofishing, netting, etc.) used to evaluate, monitor, and manage Mississippi's nationally acclaimed crappie fisheries. It also can be utilized by other biologists, crappie anglers, and tournament organizations to improve crappie management. In turn, this should also increase angling success and maximize tournament participation.

**Acknowledgements:** Results were obtained from websites and/or Facebook pages of the American Crappie Trail, Crappie Masters, and National Crappie League national tournament organizations, the Magnolia Crappie Club, PTG Outdoors, and the Crappie Masters Mississippi Trail - Western division.

Tournament organizers that want to participate directly in next year's Crappie Tournament Summary can email their 2023 tournament results to either:

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Table 4. Final rankings of 7-fish crappie tournament lakes in Mississippi based on 2023 results.

Overall Rank	Hours to catch a crappie $\geq$ 2 lbs.	Average daily 1 <sup>st</sup> place weight (lbs.)	Average Lunker (lbs.)	Average weight (lbs.) of fish	Average number of crappie per angler per day	Average lbs. per angler per day
#1 Arkabutla (1)*	Arkabutla 3	Arkabutla 17.50	Arkabutla 3.46	Arkabutla 2.02	Arkabutla 4.53	Arkabutla 9.13
#2 Grenada (4)	Sardis 14	Grenada 17.06	Sardis 3.30	Sardis 1.96	Grenada 4.18	Grenada 7.63
#3 Sardis (2)	Grenada 22	Sardis 16.95	Grenada 3.14	Grenada 1.80	Barnett 4.05	Sardis 7.50
#4 Barnett (3)	Barnett 31	Barnett 14.75	Barnett 2.59	Barnett 1.59	Sardis 3.79	Barnett 6.30
#5 Enid (2)	Eagle 79	Eagle 13.79	Eagle 2.37	Enid 1.47	Wolf 3.42	Enid 4.28
#6 Eagle (2)	Enid 127	Enid 13.19	Enid 2.22	Eagle 1.43	Ferguson** 3.31	Eagle 4.15
#7 Ferguson** (1)	Ferguson** 266	Ferguson** 12.42	Ferguson** 2.04	Ferguson** 1.21	Enid 2.91	Ferguson** 4.00
#8 Wolf (1)	Wolf 1000	Wolf 9.99	Wolf 1.64	Wolf 1.05	Eagle 2.88	Wolf 3.58

\*Number of 7-fish tournaments in parentheses.

\*\* Lakes Ferguson, Lee (both MS), and Chicot (AR) were included in this event.

Table 5. Final rankings of 5-fish crappie tournament lakes in Mississippi based on 2023 results.

Overall Rank	Hours to catch a crappie $\geq$ 2 lbs.	Average daily 1 <sup>st</sup> place weight (lbs.)	Average Lunker (lbs.)	Average weight (lbs.) of fish	Average number of crappie per angler per day	Average lbs. per angler per day
#1 Barnett (1)*	Barnett 3	Barnett 11.80	Barnett 3.23	Barnett 1.89	Barnett 5.60	Barnett 10.58
#2 Sardis (1)	Sardis 26	Sardis 10.43	Sardis 2.54	Sardis 1.75	Sardis 2.28	Sardis 3.99
#3 Grenada** (1)	Grenada 276	Grenada 9.38	Grenada 2.41	Grenada 1.17	Grenada 1.42	Grenada 1.66

\*Number of 5-fish tournaments in parentheses.

\*\*Crankbait trolling only, no live sonar, 6-hr June event

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