

**State of California  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
North Central Region**

**Caples Lake, Alpine County**

**2015 Angler Survey Box Analysis**



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## Introduction

Caples Lake is an El Dorado Irrigation District (E.I.D) managed reservoir in Alpine County. At full capacity it covers 620 surface acres and is situated at approximately 7,820 feet above mean sea level. It is located off Highway 88, roughly one mile west of the Carson Pass and about 17 miles south of Lake Tahoe (Figure 1). Woods Creek and Emigrant Creek are the two main sources of inflow for the lake. Caples Lake drains into Caples Creek, which flows into the South Fork American River. Caples Lake is open to angling all year with a five trout bag limit and 10 inch possession regulation.

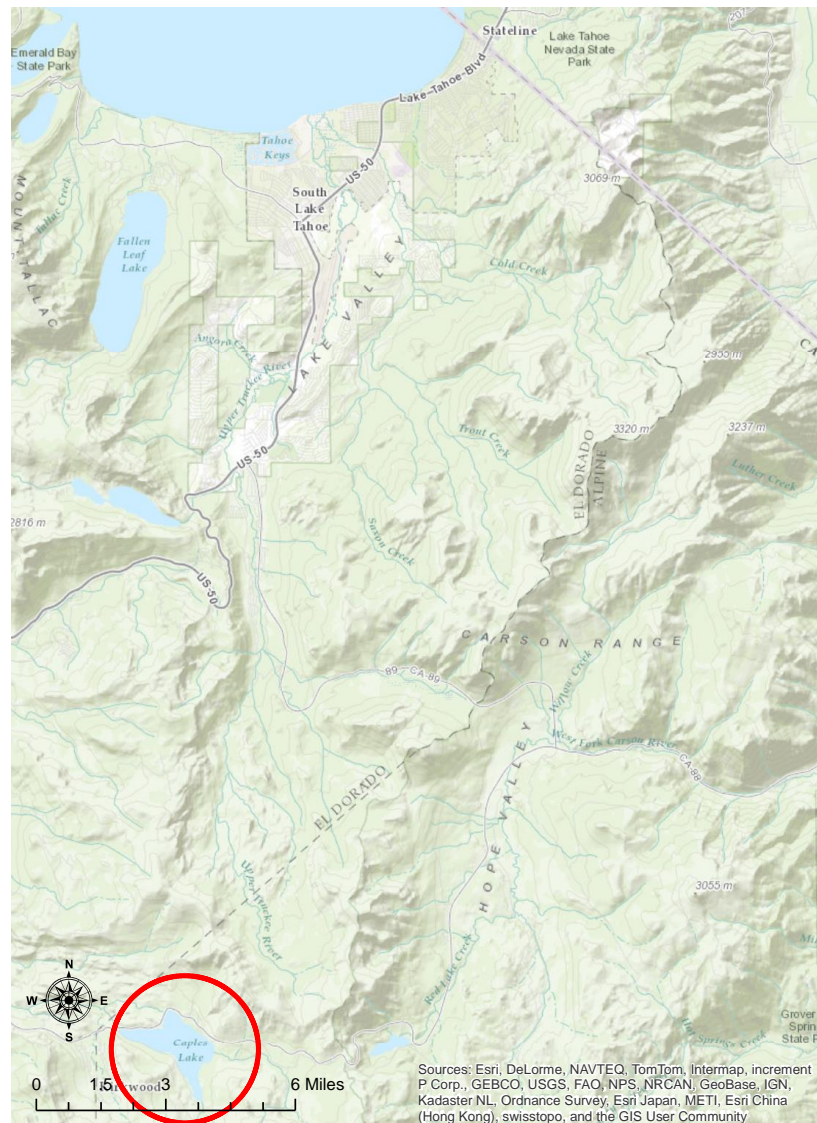


Figure 1. Caples Lake (Alpine County, CA)

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) fish files indicate Caples Lake has been stocked since 1930 by CDFW for recreational fishing. Historically, Caples Lake has been planted with rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) (RT), brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) (BK), brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) (BN), and lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*) (LT). Currently only RT and BN are planted in Caples Lake by CDFW and E.I.D (Appendix 1). Along with current and past CDFW stocking, Caples Lake currently supports populations of non-game fish such as Lahontan reddsides (*Richardsonius egregius*) and tui chub (*Gila bicolor*) as well as a self-sustaining LT fishery.

In order to assess the fishery, CDFW installed three angler survey boxes (ASB) at the lake. One box was installed just below the lake's spillway, one at the E.I.D public boat launch, and the third is at the Woods Creek parking lot (Figure 2). Anglers voluntarily fill out a survey sheet after they complete their fishing trip, and deposit it in one of the boxes. CDFW uses the data collected to assess angler satisfaction, species composition, and angler catch statistics at the lake. This report covers the data collected from Caples Lake ASB from 2015.

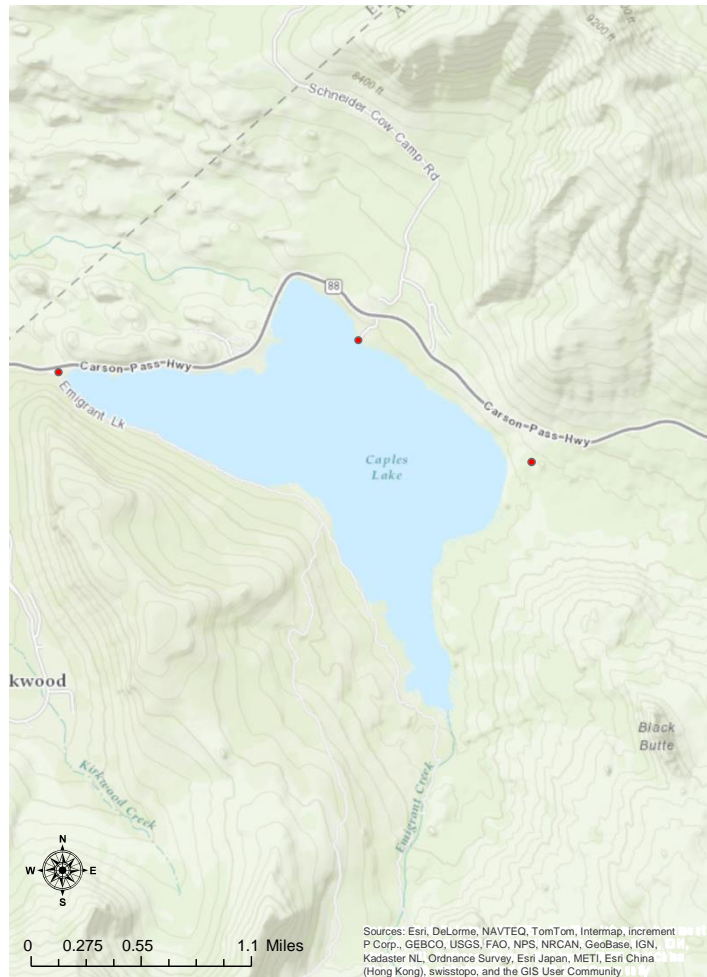


Figure 2. Caples Lake ASB locations.

## Methods

Anglers were asked to fill out a voluntary survey form about their fishing. The survey asks anglers for information regarding hours fished, type of gear used, and the number of landed fish. They were also asked the size and species of the fish landed and whether they kept or released their catch. Finally, anglers were asked three questions, and their answers were recorded on a scale of -2 to 2, with “2” representing most satisfied and “-2” representing least satisfied. The questions pertain to satisfaction of overall angling experience, size, and number of fish. The back of the survey form is reserved for anglers who have any additional comments.

## Results

A total of 67 anglers responded to the survey (Table 1). Cumulatively, these anglers reported 48 fish landed. The average catch per angler and hours per angler was 0.72 and 3.9, respectively. A total of 258.25 hours of fishing were documented for an average catch per hour of 0.19.

Table 1. Collection of average effort and catch statistics recorded from the 2015 ASB at Caples Lake.

Respondents	Hours Fished	Fish Landed	Catch per Angler	Catch per Hour	Hours per Angler
67	258.25	48	0.72	0.19	3.9

Anglers reported using bait, lures, and flies while fishing at Caples Lake (Table 2). Twenty-nine anglers (43%) used bait and had a 0.5 catch/angler average. This was the highest identifiable gear used to take fish. One angler recorded fly fishing as an angling method but caught zero fish. Anglers using only lures had a 0.4 catch/angler average. Anglers using multiple methods of gear had a 0.5 catch/angler average. Anglers not reporting their method of take had the highest catch/angler average with 3.3.

Table 2. The frequency of anglers that used each angling method and their corresponding catch rates in 2015.

Angling Method	Number of Anglers	Catch per Angler
Bait	29	0.5
Lure	10	0.4
Fly	1	0.0
Multiple	21	0.5
Not Recorded	6	3.3

Ninety-six percent of fish landed were RT. LT made up four percent of the total catch. Anglers reported 35 RT (76% of RT) measured less than 14.0 inches in total length (Figure 3). Anglers reported landing five (10% of total fish landed) fish greater than 20.0 inches, which were made up of three RT and two LT. Modal size class for RT (n = 14) was in the 12.0 - 13.9 inch size class (Table 3). The modal size class for LT (n = 2) was in the 20.0 - 21.9 inch size class.

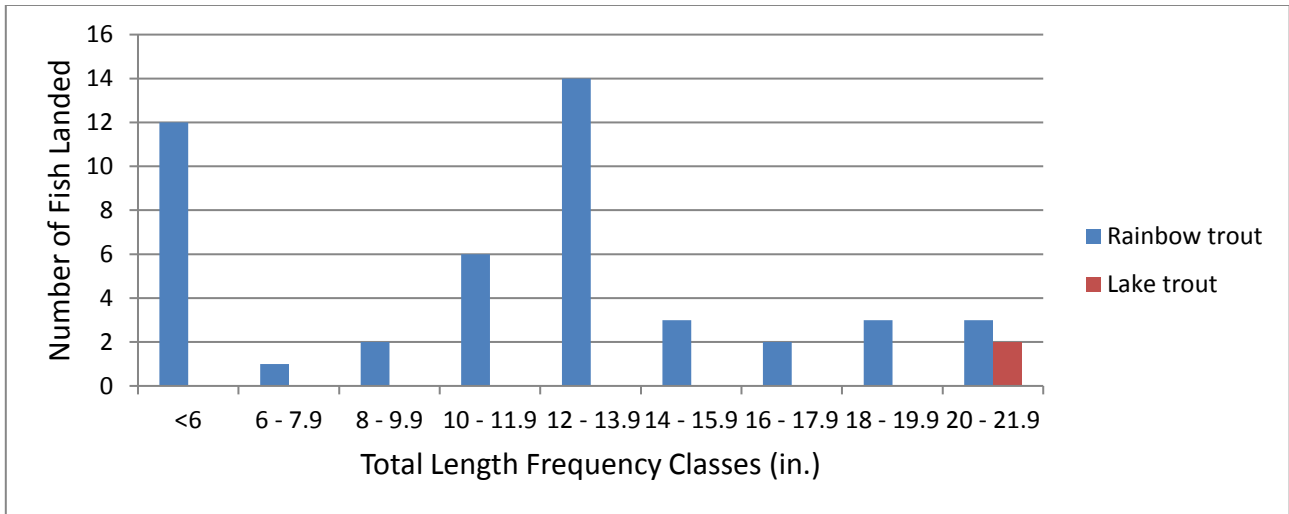


Figure 3. Frequency of fish in each size class that anglers reported landing at Caples Lake in 2015.

Table 3. Data on kept and released fish at Caples Lake in 2015.

Species	Kept	Released	Total Caught	Percent of Total Catch	Percent Released	Modal Size Class
RT	32	14	46	96	29	12.0 - 13.9
LT	1	1	2	4	2	20.0 - 21.9
Total	33	15	48			

In 2015, anglers reported being neither satisfied nor unsatisfied with the fishery in regards to overall satisfaction (0.0). Anglers were satisfied with the size of the fish they caught (0.7), and the numbers of fish they caught (0.2).

## Discussion

The data gathered from the Caples Lake ASB had shown anglers to have caught less than one fish on average per day. Catch per unit effort was only 0.19 fish/hour. The number of respondents in the survey was 67, which provides CDFW a good representation of the fishery. However, an ASB survey does not get an estimation of the total number of anglers or total number of fish landed. It is essential that CDFW promotes angler participation in the ASB survey, especially since 2015 was the first survey year at Caples Lake and many anglers might not have been aware of the ASB.

Catch rates for anglers using bait and multiple methods were tied for highest rates using identified gear. Six anglers did not record the type of gear used but had a catch rate of 3.3 fish/angler. It would be beneficial for CDFW to encourage anglers to completely fill out the survey, to get a complete and accurate assessment of gear usage by anglers.

The ASB survey showed the overwhelming majority of fish caught by anglers were RT. No BN were reported being caught. At least two more years of data should be collected in order to assess the



BN stocking program at Caples Lake. CDFW should install a species identification sign listing all of the fish present in Caples Lake. The sign could include a few words explaining how the lake is a diverse recreational fishery.

Seventy-six percent of RT caught in Caples Lake measured less than 14 inches in total length. This corresponds with stocking data, as likely 100% of fish stocked by CDFW and a portion of the RT that E.I.D. contributed were less than 14 inches in length (Appendix 1). Anglers were satisfied with the size of fish caught. E.I.D. planted 4,659 lbs. of 2.5 lb. and greater RT into Caples Lake in 2014 and 2015 and anglers have caught large-size RT from Caples Lake. It is not known whether the three RT caught in the 20.0 – 21.9 inch class were holdovers or E.I.D. stocked trophies.

Anglers were satisfied with the number of fish they caught even though the average fish per angler was less than one (0.72). The majority of anglers that responded to the survey fished before October 1. In general, trout fishing is slower in the summer rather than the spring and fall in which the overall water temperature is cooler and trout are more active. It is also possible that the anglers were fishing from shore in which it would be more difficult to target trout that inhabit greater depths where cooler water is present. During the next ASB Survey, CDFW will possibly add a question to the ASB sheet asking whether the angler fished from shore, boat, or float tube. The lack of BN being caught could be entirely related to the time of year anglers reported their fishing experience, since BN generally can be targeted in reservoirs in the fall when water temperatures are cooler and they occupy shallower depths to feed and spawn.

The overall fishing experience for anglers was neutral at Caples Lake. Ideally, a lake where anglers had a positive experience with the size and numbers of trout caught would likely have a positive overall experience fishing for that day. The neutral angling experience might not have anything to do with actual fishing but possibly caused by outside factors such as weather, fishing access, crowds, etc. Having more anglers respond to the survey, filling them out completely, and having multiple years' worth of data could help with managing the fishery in order to satisfy the needs of anglers.

## **Recommendations**

- CDFW staff should install a species identification board on the ASB at Caples Lake, in order to minimize species misidentification by anglers.
- If present, CDFW staff should continue to encourage anglers to fill out the ASB forms in future trips.
- CDFW will look into adding a question to the ASB sheet, asking whether the angler fished from shore, boat, or tube.
- Assess the BN stocking allotments.

Appendix 1. Stocking history at Caples Lake 2014 - 2015.

CDFW

Date	Species	Weight (lbs.)	Number	Size
5/13/2014	BN	140.4	22,745	Fingerling
6/2/2014	RT	413.1	124,756	Fingerling
6/13/2014	RT	1700.0	5,610	Catchable
6/13/2014	RT	3300.0	6,600	Catchable
6/19/2014	RT	1300.0	3,900	Catchable
6/19/2014	RT	2700.0	5,400	Catchable
4/30/2015	BN	80.4	25,000	Fingerling
6/1/2015	ELT	2000.0	8,000	Catchable
6/29/2015	RT	381.7	79,400	Fingerling
7/10/2015	ELT	750.0	2250	Catchable

E.I.D.

Date	Species	Weight (lbs.)	Number	Size
2014	RT	1633.5	3267	Catchable
2014	RT	841.5	337	Trophy
2014	RT	1,600.0	640	Trophy
2015	RT	1,197.9	2396	Catchable
2015	RT	617.1	247	Trophy
2015	RT	1,600	640	Trophy