



## “FISH NOTES”

Another winter has passed, at least almost. I keep waiting for the day that it stays warm. Business has been pretty steady since the first of March. One major project that we participated in was a little out of the norm. Many of you have heard of the Northern Snakehead, a fish much like a bowfin or grennel. This unwelcome visitor originates in Asia and is a major food fish in that part of the world. The fish were inadvertently released into an irrigation ditch in Monroe county several years back. The result was an expanding population of the fish in the Piney Creek watershed near Brinkley. This was cause of great concern because the fish is a voracious predator and they spawn multiple times in a year. They are capable of breathing air and can go dormant in the mud during drought. The can live out of water for up to three days in a moist environment and can move short distances on land using their pectoral fins. All of this adds up to a very hearty fish that can reproduce enough to crowd out native species. In a response to this threat, the snakehead eradication project was initiated. The project consisted of killing out the 55,000 acre (77 square mile) watershed that encompasses Pine Creek and Little Piney Creek. The Commission put together about a hundred person crew responsible for eradication by use of rotenone, assessing the effort, detoxifying the rotenone, and support of the overall project. We had crews in the air, on the ground, and on the water. Considering the enormity of the project it was a great success, especially in the fact that we had no major injuries or damage to equipment. The effort progressed like a well-oiled machine moving through the watershed from north to south. We killed every creek, irrigation ditch, road ditch, and mud puddle. Though hampered by rains, we were able to complete the project on time at a cost of nearly one million bucks.

It amazes me how one little inadvertent act, through ignorance or carelessness, can cause such ecological calamity and have such an economic impact. I would hazard to guess that nearly all of the exotics introduced into the United States have been done so through ignorance or carelessness. Some of these I'm sure you have heard of like the zebra mussels, silver carp, northern snakeheads, and New Zealand mud snails. But it doesn't end there. Much of the nuisance aquatic vegetation we deal with has its origination outside of the United States and was brought in as ornamentals for decorative fish ponds. Problem is this is not a battle that is fought once and won. We will be dealing with these issues now and forever. On Lake Conway alone we are spending

\$15,000-20,000 per year in treating nuisance vegetation. This is money that, instead of being spent on improvements, maintenance, and research of our natural resources, will be directed toward controlling something that shouldn't be here in the first place.

Work began this January with a habitat project on Greers Ferry Lake. Twenty-five brush piles consisting of about 500 Christmas trees were placed in the areas of Sandy Beech, Devil's Fork, and Frontier Canyon. These brush piles will serve as refuge to young fish and bait fish while providing prime areas for anglers for years to come.



ID	Latitude	Longitude
1	-92.06041532770	35.49370030050
2	-92.05778971460	35.50484519180
3	-92.05398963700	35.50133696090
4	-92.05371594890	35.50307527000
5	-92.05219799070	35.50304043250
6	-92.05217876190	35.50312010230
7	-92.05387365990	35.50088847980
8	-92.18293320780	35.59030145320
9	-92.18780480920	35.58776365760
10	-92.18339558570	35.59004399800
11	-92.18463500240	35.58583939860
12	-92.18125364180	35.59144145530
14	-92.17973931470	35.59626936000
15	-92.17528578540	35.59655404310
16	-92.17708640430	35.59265729590
17	-92.17795666590	35.59773423190
18	-92.17412270970	35.60128248550
19	-92.17408366900	35.59756787720
22	-92.09466022270	35.61822282900
25	-92.09576790070	35.61731672250
27	-92.06254605730	35.61681848200
26	-92.09008195210	35.62010342540

Before the rains came in early March, we worked in three walleye electrofishing samples on Greers Ferry Lake. Devil's Fork produced a decent number of walleye with both males and females staging in the area, getting ready to spawn. The following night we sampled the "Big Dike" on the lake. This area produced a moderate amount of walleye and not surprisingly a couple of nice smallmouth as well. The next sample site was on the South Fork. This area was not sufficiently sampled due to heavy rains. However, in the one run that we did accomplish, we collected several largemouth and spotted bass, and some nice white and hybrid striped bass. Some of these fish were collected for VHS samples and sent to UAPB for analysis.

Right before the scheduled snakehead eradication we were able to assist the State Steam Biologist, Jeff Quinn in tagging 400 yearling channel catfish that were stocked in Lake Overcup. Four-hundred and ninety of the tags will be randomly assigned a value of \$10 to \$100. These tags are yellow in color and the reward amount is not labeled on them. Ten additional pink tags were assigned a value of \$100. This tag return study will provide us with important information on the exploitation or harvest of channel catfish in Lake Overcup.



This upcoming month, we will be focusing on the spring bass electrofishing samples. In addition to the standard samples, we will be collecting genetic samples from largemouth bass on Lake Conway to determine how the periodic stocking of Florida strain largemouth bass are affecting the overall genetic make up of the bass population. In addition to this we collected the otoliths of approximately 100 bass to determine the age structure and growth of the population.

### **Lake Manager Updates**

Well, I hope everyone enjoyed their winter. I did, but now I am looking forward to some nice spring weather. So far it hasn't been too bad. I have had to open all the spillway gates on Lake Conway a few times but that is nothing out of the norm for this time of year.

The vegetation control on Lake Conway was very successful last summer. If you remember we had a contractor with an airboat apply herbicides (rated for aquatic use) to about 22 miles of shoreline, in an effort to knock back the alligatorweed growing around the lake. We focused on residential areas to allow adjacent landowners access to their piers and boathouses. Also, we had an aerial application of herbicide to water lily (i.e. spatterdock) in the Pierce Creek and Dix Creek areas totaling 140 acres.

This year, starting in May, I am going to have the airboat applicator begin treatment of alligatorweed around the lake. He will be starting in the residential areas, to kill off what is left, and then move to the major source areas in the mouths of Palarm and Caney Creek. He will hopefully be able to treat those areas every 2 weeks until the end of October. I am also planning on having him treat some patches of water lily in the

residential areas and at Gold Creek. In addition, I plan on having an aerial application on water lily in the Palarm Creek arm of the lake.

The Lake Conway nursery pond has already received 210 adult white crappie, which will spawn and provide a good crop for the lake this fall. The pond will also be stocked with 10,000 yearling channel catfish, which we will feed up until the release of the pond sometime in November. The catfish should reach between 1 to 1.5 lbs. by that time.

I have completed the enforcement phase of making sure all adjacent landowners to Lake Overcup are in compliance with our Land Use Policy, which includes removing encroachments and permitting their piers and boathouses. I feel like it was very successful. I sent out 55 violation notification via certified mail listing the landowner's violations and giving them 90 days to comply with our requests. After 90 days I followed up on the violations, and there were only 5 to 6 landowners who still weren't in compliance. After 90 days anyone not in compliance will, in most situations, receive a citation, with a minimum fee of around \$200. I plan on starting this process on Harris Brake Lake sometime this summer.

Speaking of Harris Brake Lake, we still anticipate having a major drawdown on the lake which would take place from August to December of this year. However, we are still waiting for our budget approval to ensure we will have sufficient funds to cover all project costs during the drawdown. Projects include cutting stumps and marking all boat trails with steel posts and large reflective markers, replacing the drawdown structure in the dam, cleaning out the spillway, and repairing the boat launch on the dam. We will know for sure the details of the drawdown by the next newsletter.

That's it for now. I hope everyone has a great spring, and if you have any questions regarding permitting structures or our Land Use Policy feel free to contact me anytime!

**God Bless and see you on the River!**

***Good Luck and Good Fishing!***

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