



FISHERIES DISTRICT 2 NEWSLETTER

Ken Shirley District Supervisor E-mail: kshirley@agfc.state.ar.us

Stan Todd Assistant Biologist E-mail: stodd@agfc.state.ar.us

Toni Nordyke Secretary E-mail: tknordyke@agfc.state.ar.us

North Central Ofc. 201 E. 5TH Street Mtn. Home, AR 72653 Tel: (877) 425-7577

Welcome from Fisheries District 2 at the start of what appears to be a very busy year. Fishing has been very good this spring on the reservoirs. Big crappie have been the highlight with many 2 pounders being caught. I hope you have been taking advantage of these opportunities.

The annual meeting where we obtain public comments on our proposed 2010 regulation changes and receive suggestions from the public on their recommended changes will be held on **May 5**. It will be at **7:00 PM in McMillan Lecture Hall on the ASU Mountain Home campus**. If you have any comments on our regulations, come on over.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

We began walleye electrofishing with one sample each on Bull Shoals and Norfolk but will have to continue into early April due to the loss of two weeks on the huge snakehead eradication project discussed later and loss of two other sample nights to equipment breakdown and lightning. From the walleye collected so far it appears their size is excellent on both lakes with those on Bull Shoals averaging at least an inch larger than on Norfolk. The majority of the walleye collected greatly exceeded the 18" length limit. Due to the huge threadfin shad spawn in 2008 on both lakes, the walleye are much plumper than normal and probably portend great growth this year of all game fish species.

We conducted a collection of fish on the Buffalo River as part of a statewide project to determine the presence or absence of a serious fish disease, Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) currently causing havoc in some northern states. So far it has not found its way to Arkansas but has resulted in quarantines of fish from those states. While commercial bait should no longer reach Arkansas, you can do your part to prevent the spread of this and other diseases and invasive species by not bringing in wild caught bait from waters outside the watershed in which you are fishing.

We helped Trout and District 1 personnel on a trout tagging operation on the Beaver Lake Tailwater. Tag returns will provide an estimate of the percent of stocked trout which are caught and harvested. And, collection of the fish in later samples will help us estimate growth. Interestingly, a bald eagle watched us the entire time and at least once took one of the anesthetized trout after its release. He probably watches that boat ramp any time a fish truck arrives. From the high number of active nests on the Bull Shoals Tailwater, it appears eagles really like our stockings of hatchery-raised trout.

Henry Hodges, our fish habitat contractor has completed the tree pile portion of the Table Rock Lake fish habitat project and has moved to Norfolk Lake where he is now

sinking some of the many trees downed by the ice storm.

Ken and Stan both assisted the Trout Program by acting as observers multiple times on the Bull Shoals/Norfolk tailwater creel survey flights. The Trout Program is currently understaffed due to the transfer of Matt Schroeder to District 10 and Eli Powers to the coldwater habitat program but has been able to continue the creel survey uninterrupted. We served on the interview panel for Eli's replacement who should be on board soon. The process for replacing Matt is underway.

Stan, with assistance from the Trout Program conducted an electrofishing sample on a private lake. Upon request we sample private waters and provide fish management recommendations.

The major project this spring was an attempt to eradicate a potentially invasive fish, the northern snakehead from an entire watershed in the delta region of Arkansas. The northern snakehead is an air breathing predator fish with sharp teeth and strong jaws. It is most similar in both appearance and habitat to the native bowfin.



Northern Snakehead

A reproducing population of the species was found last spring in the Piney Creek drainage near Brinkley and the decision was made to try to eradicate them. In one ditch sampled at that time snakeheads made up nearly the entire fish population - an

indication of its potential to cause problems in the ecosystem. Piney Creek is connected (via Big Creek) to the White and Mississippi Rivers and their back waters, ditches and old river lakes - ideal snakehead habitat. Once in the Mississippi River they could establish anywhere in its watershed not permanently blocked by a dam or other obstruction. Last summer we sampled massively in the surrounding watershed without finding any except in the Piney Creek system so eradication was deemed possible though extremely difficult and costly. Size of the project, as well as the difficulty of poisoning fish in marshes and flooded timber were only a few of the major complications. High water following the hurricanes last fall, followed by field flooding for ducks or agriculture prevented any earlier attempt at eradication but we were finally able to pull it off. For eight days in March virtually the entire fisheries division plus other AG&FC employees, employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and National Park Services, and private contractors applied thousands of pounds of rotenone to about 4000 acres of creeks, ditches, marshes, and flooded fields throughout the watershed.



Marsh Masters made it possible to treat marshes and ditches too large deep or weed choked to treat by foot or ATV

The massive team effort included ATV crews which drove or walked every ditch no matter how small. Marsh master crews drove through waters too large to work by foot while helicopters air applied the

chemical to other large sites. Boat crews treated large ditches or lakes where accessible. Other employees manned a drip station at the downstream end where potassium permanganate was applied to the stream to neutralize the rotenone. Those crews worked in shifts 24 hours a day and continued on site many days after application as the treated waters flowed through the system. Finally the University of Central Arkansas using 20+ students and faculty collected fish throughout the study area to assess the fish population before treatment, effectiveness of the treatment, and how long it takes recolonization and fish stocking to repair the inevitable damage we've done to the ecosystem.

Stocking:

The 2009 fish culture projects started with the stocking of 212 white crappie brood stocked into the Bull Shoals Nursery Pond. They should spawn in the pond with the fingerlings being released this summer.



Ken pouring some of the walleye fry into the Norfolk Nursery Pond

We also stocked 150,000 walleye fry into the Norfolk Nursery Pond. Those fish will be released into the lake next June if water levels permit. We thank Mike Cantrell for arranging for bulldozers to open the access roads to both projects which were closed due to the massive ice storm especially on Norfolk where fallen trees were across about two miles of road. In addition to stocking the nursery ponds, our hatcheries have stocked about 270,000 fish into our public waters so far. This total includes 15,050 brook trout, 51,438 brown trout, 200 channel catfish for a fishing derby, and 205,213 rainbow trout.

CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

Area Maintenance Coordinator Mike Cantrell continues to do an excellent job maintaining our infrastructure and planning new projects. He and his contractors keep this district's access areas the best maintained AG&FC infrastructure projects in the state. The ice storm closed some of our roads and parking areas but they were quickly reopened with lots of chainsaw work. Thanks go to several County Judges whose bulldozers opened many of the roads so the projects could at least be used while awaiting additional clean-up. Many AG&FC employees from the Mountain Home office (and I am sure from around the affected area) repaid those favors by operating chainsaws along the county roads allowing emergency crews to access isolated residences. This has been a rough year weather wise. After receiving major damage in the floods last spring, the ice storm has compounded our problems. In addition to temporary access closures and major messes, the Spring River State Fish Hatchery lost its anti-bird netting and had tree limbs on the residence. The Mountain Home Office had structural damage as well.



New Sylamore Access boat ramp while under construction

Repairs on Sylamore Access have been completed. One of its boat ramps, washed away in the 2008 flood, has now been replaced. We have also started work at Mt. Olive Access. The old, rough ramp is being replaced and we await low water to continue the renovation.

MISCELLANEOUS

Ken checked a report from the public that bald eagles had erected a nest within the Panther Bay Recreation Area on Norfolk Lake (while the site was closed for the winter). It was there and the U.C. Corps of Engineers was notified of the occurrence. It survived the ice storm and at last report it is still occupied.

We attended two Fisheries Division staff meetings in which regulation proposals, budgeting and other items were discussed. Other meetings attended included the annual meetings of the Southern Division and Arkansas Chapters of the American Fisheries Society, a meeting with resort owners and Norfolk lake Chamber of Commerce representatives concerning regulations on Norfolk, and a public meeting conducted by the corps of Engineers concerning changes to the rules concerning fishing around marinas.

Several meetings were held with trout Program personnel and the public concerning the Trout Management Plan.

Ken presented a portion of the annual fishing seminar conducted by guide Ron Schneider. Geared to anglers new to the area the seminars teach techniques which work well on area waters, safety, and use of regulations booklets, info about the AG&FC and many other items useful to new anglers.