

January – March 2009



## FISHERIES DISTRICT 5 NEWSLETTER

Diana Andrews District Biologist E-mail: [dlandrews@agfc.state.ar.us](mailto:dlandrews@agfc.state.ar.us)

Jeremy Risley Asst. District Biologist E-mail: [jtrisley@agfc.state.ar.us](mailto:jtrisley@agfc.state.ar.us)

Southeast Regional Office 771 Jordan Drive Monticello, AR 71655 Tel: (877) 367-3559

### Searching for Paddlefish on the Mississippi River

District 5 spent a good part of the winter working on the Mississippi River collecting paddlefish. Some days were adventures when the weather was nice and others were brutal when it was below freezing and 20 mph winds. You may be asking yourself “why in the world were we out there and what were you doing?” We were working with local commercial fishermen to collect paddlefish to get a better understanding of the population within the river. Paddlefish are an important commercial fish and the roe (fish eggs) are sold as caviar. With the amount of money being generated from the sell of the eggs, paddlefish populations can receive a tremendous amount of pressure. The commercial fishermen would run their gillnets and would collect all the paddlefish in the nets. They would then bring them to us on the near by river bank or jetty. We would get a length and weight measurement. We then would determine gender. Once the gender was determined, we would remove a piece of fin for genetic purposes and a piece of jaw for aging purposes. If the fish was a gravid (having eggs) female, we would weigh the ovaries and take a 50 gram subsample. The subsample of eggs will be counted. We went out for a total of 11 days from Dec. 2008 to March 2009. We collected a total of 439 fish. The sizes of fish collected

ranged from 5 to 43 inches. We collected 228 females, 201 males, and 10 juveniles. Of the 228 females collected, 45 of them were gravid. We are going to work up all the data we collected and use computer models to determine which regulation would be best for this population of paddlefish. This is the first time that the AGFC has collected age and growth data for paddlefish in the Mississippi River.



**Two commercial Fishermen with a large paddlefish**

## **Lake Chicot Nursery Pond “Beginning of another year”**

The pump on the nursery pond was turned on in February. The pond completely filled 2-3 weeks, later. We stocked 57 white crappie and 47 black crappie. Once the fish were collected, we released them into the nursery pond. Fathead minnows were stocked in the nursery pond for the crappie to feed on. Spawning shelters were also placed in the pond so the fathead minnows will have a place to spawn to keep replenishing the food source. Fathead minnows spawn multiple times and they spawn by placing the eggs on their head and sticking them to the underside of anything such as rocks, stumps and other objects. The nursery pond will be released sometime toward the end of October or the first of November. One new thing we are trying this year is blue pond dye to combat the filamentous algae problem. So if you drive by the pond and it looks like a swimming pool, now you will now the reason.

## **2009 Lake Chicot Drawdown**

We had a public meeting on February 26 to discuss the proposed drawdown for 2009. We had 51 people attend the meeting. The drawdown is one of the Lake Chicot Management Plans action items and is held every 5 years. It is a 5-foot drawdown that will be started on June 1st and will last till January 1, 2010. We draw down the lake to allow the bottom to harden which increases the spawning success of sport fish, allows the small forage fish to be preyed on to decrease stunting of those populations, causes strong year class production the following year for sport fish, and allows dock owners to repair their docks. Connerly bayou, Ditch Bayou and State Park ramps will still be able to be used during the drawdown. If you have any question about the drawdown, feel free to contact us about it.

## **Creel Survey on Lake Monticello**

We completed the creel survey on February 28 on Lake Monticello. We conducted 834 interviews during the 192 creel days. We got some very valuable information that will help us to manage the lake better. We did see some interesting things from the survey. We only had 25 bass harvest over the slot and 96 under the slot. We got reports of 701 bass below the slot, 653 within the slot, and 157 above the slot that were caught and released during the survey. We also had 828 crappie harvested from the lake. We had 300 bass anglers sign up for the mail survey. Of the 300 anglers that signed up, 234 people completed it and mailed it back to us. We are in the process of working up all this data. We would like to say thank you to all the anglers that participated in this survey.

## **Public Meeting for future regulations**

A public meeting will be held at the Monticello Regional Office on May 7 at 7 pm. The meeting will consist of going over the proposed regulations changes for 2010. District 5 did not propose any new regulations for the upcoming year. However, we welcome all to come and listen to the regulations changes occurring in other districts through the state.

## **Get your net ready, it's time to catch the big ones!!**

This year sample should have been called endurance marathons. A couple of nights, we did not get home till 2 or 3 am. Spring electrofishing samples were conducted on Lake Monticello and Lake Chicot. Electrofishing samples are used to sample largemouth bass to determine the population abundance, condition and trends over time. District 5 used the electrofishing sampling procedure involving sampling a given number of randomly selected 600 meter segments throughout each lake. This allows us to make better recommendations and decisions concerning regulations for these water bodies. As of now, none of the electrofishing data has been worked up. More information about this year's electrofishing season will be included in the next newsletter. However we would like to thank Colton Dennis, Black Bass Biologist, Kevin Hopkins, Assistant Black Bass Biologist, and Andy Case

## **Sandra Harper hangs it up!!**

District 5 technician, Sandra Harper retires after 33 years of working for the AGFC. She has worked in the district for 14 years. She has always been a hard worker and will be missed. We wish Sandra a great retirement!!!

**January**



**Two juvenile paddlefish**



**Paddlefish Roe (eggs)**