



Spring 2009

How many of you noticed that you didn't receive a newsletter in January? It is quite understandable that it may have slipped your mind with everything that is happening. However, I will admit to feeling a little "bruised" because no one called this office wondering where their newsletter was... (just kidding).

There really is a reason that the winter newsletter was not distributed. The folks in Little Rock wanted to put together a first class, professional looking, and division-wide publication containing the fisheries highlights of 2008 and send it to everyone on every district's mailing list. There is an old saying about warfare and it is "the battle plan seldom survives the first contact with the enemy". In this case, the enemy was time.

This idea of a "Fisheries Highlights of 2008" was (and is) a good one that you would hopefully enjoy, but we simply didn't have time to put it together. Instead, we have included a District 7 "highlights of 2008". First, there is a great deal of stuff to tell you about and some of it may even be interesting, but you'll have to be the judge of that.

The major happening that took an unbelievable amount of time, effort,

sweat, and gnashing of teeth was the snakehead eradication operation. This "campaign" actually took place in March near Brinkley but it had been in the planning stages since last summer when it was learned that the snakeheads were confined to the Piney Creek drainage.

Why, you may ask, did it take so long to plan an operation to kill a few fish using rotenone? This is a perfectly understandable question until you realize that we didn't just kill out a farm pond or even a lake. We killed an entire creek drainage.

This drainage runs through some very rich and expensive farm land owned by over fifty different land owners, each of which had to be contacted for permission to operate on their land. The farm land has miles and miles of drainage ditches and creeks that connect to Piney Creek. There are reservoirs and fields that are pumped up for duck season and then drained for the growing of rice, cotton and soy beans. Every ditch, creek, reservoir and field that still contained water had to be treated with rotenone. In addition, there were two helicopters spraying liquid rotenone in flooded timber and along the main stem of Piney Creek. All of that rotenone immediately

started heading downstream with the water.

At a choke point where Piney Creek ran under a bridge, there was a crew set up to apply the potassium permanganate used to detoxify the water. This “detox station” had to be manned around the clock to keep toxic water from entering Big Creek, which flows into the White River just a few miles downstream.

There were approximately 12 two-man rotenone crews on 4-wheelers who treated mainly the drainage ditches along the highways, county roads, and farm fields.

There were 4 crews operating out of all-terrain tracked vehicles known as Marsh Masters. These crews treated areas that were inaccessible to 4-wheelers such as duck reservoirs, larger ditches and some flooded fields.



Marsh Master in operation (photo by Trey Reid)

There were, on some days, 3 crews operating out of boats in parts of the main stem of Piney Creek, in larger ditches, and in some small lakes within the drainage.

This effort resembled a military operation and in today's world, any successful military operation needs air support. Did I mention the helicopters? Although the helicopters were assigned areas to treat daily, they were sometimes available for “air strikes” that were

called in from those of us on the ground. For example, if a Marsh Master crew was assigned an area that was more suited to treatment from the air, the Marsh Master crew could go through the chain of command and request air support. Several large tracks of flooded timber were treated in this manner.

It took several people on the ground to keep the helicopters working. They had to be kept fueled and required very frequent stops for re-arming with liquid rotenone. Since the liquid rotenone was mixed with water, a water truck had to accompany each helicopter. The liquid rotenone had a tendency to separate in the barrel and had to be mixed or shaken to ensure a homogenous mixture prior to being loaded. This was done by hand using electric drill motors equipped with make-shift paint stirrers.

In addition to all of the rotenone application crews, there were people whose sole responsibility was to make sure everybody had the supplies they needed on a day to day basis. Supplies such as safety equipment, goggles, rubber gloves, chemical suits, GPS batteries, two-way radios, etc, were either changed or checked daily. These folks came to work as the field people were going to bed.

Every crew was given a map daily that had that crew's responsibility clearly defined. These maps were actually generated from satellite photos by Scott Lane, the Game and Fish GIS analyst. Scott did a masterful job of making sure every ditch, every creek, and every reservoir in the drainage was targeted for treatment. This whole operation would not have been possible without his expertise.

We had daily briefings prior to each days work and debriefings at days end. These meetings were run by the field

commanders who were in constant communication with Scott Lane and the helicopter crews. It was as close to a military operation as I've been a part of.

Starting two days after the rotenone application began, the assessment crews were following the rotenone crews in an effort to judge our success (or lack of it). They had an extremely difficult task because they had to visit as much of the treated area as possible with very little help. They not only had to estimate the number of snakeheads they saw but also the game fish. After all, Piney Creek will need to be restocked.

I've gone on and on about this operation but it was very important to try to get rid of these fish. Did we actually succeed in killing every single snakehead in the area? Time will tell. At the very least, it is thought that a great deal of time was bought. There is a population of these fish that is causing grief to the state of Maryland and no one knows the impact these fish will have on the Potomac River system. As Mike Armstrong, Chief of Fisheries said, "the eyes of the nation are on us".



Northern snakehead, "the enemy"

We've actually done other stuff this spring that bears mention. After all, it is the springtime and it is our busiest time of year. We started our electrofishing on

Bois d'Arc Lake and the largemouth population is in great shape. If a person couldn't catch a bass on Bois d'Arc, he or she isn't trying hard enough. We actually finished the electrofishing on Bois d'Arc in only one night. The only area of the lake that was lacking in numbers of bass was the southeast portion just north of the spillway. This area is shallow and filled with grass. The buffalo were very abundant in this area. Every where else we went, bass were very numerous. They appeared to be very healthy. We're not sure, at this time, what to do with the bass regulations. If we decide to allow some harvest of largemouth bass, it will undoubtedly be a very restrictive regulation such as that on Millwood; 3 bass per day and some sort of length limit. We'll see.

We also started electrofishing on Lake Greeson and there were no surprises here. The lower end of the lake is very unproductive but there were bass everywhere we looked above the Highway 70 bridge. Pike County Wildlife Officer Ronnie White provided some very effective and appreciated help on Greeson as the following photo by Drew shows.



Wildlife Officer Ronnie White with a nice Lake Greeson largemouth

Ronnie is a very pleasant fellow but if you're in Pike County and you're bent on catching too many fish or hunting without a license, you may end up with a citation, but it would still be a pleasant experience...maybe.

Some of you may know this already, but this is the third year the Game and Fish has stocked brown trout at the Narrows Tailwater. Each time, these trout have been tagged by the hatchery crew in Mammoth Springs or by Jeff Williams and his crew. Jeff is the Trout Management Supervisor for the whole state. The reason for the tags is to allow us to track the movements, growth rates and survival of brown trout in the Narrows Tailwater. At this time, you can try to catch all the brown trout you want but you may NOT keep any of them. The browns that were stocked last week were 5"-6" long and there were approximately 950 of them. They were equally divided among River Ridge, Hind's Bluff, and Old Factory Site. These came along with a bunch of rainbow trout that were also stocked at River Ridge.



Stocking rainbows at River Ridge

There are plans to do some sampling in the trout water to determine how the browns are doing. Our creel survey indicated that either the browns weren't

being caught or that folks simply don't recognize a brown when they see one.

The following photo shows what we hope to have one of these days.



A nice 17" brown trout

The sampling will tell us quite a bit about whether or not to keep bringing the brown trout to the Narrows Tailwater.

As you read this newsletter, we'll be trying to supply the hatchery with some brood striped bass freshly caught in gill-nets from Lake Ouachita. I did mention that we were busy didn't I?

Just remember, as you go through life, there are only so many days allotted to each of us. Try to use them as best you can and watch where you put your feet because...



Not everyone is happy to see you!