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Bass mortality associated with summer tournaments

LITTLE ROCK - Extensive research has been conducted regarding black bass mortality associated with fishing tournaments. Over the past three decades, the results of these studies have provided a better understanding of the detrimental impacts that improper handling can have on tournament-caught fish.

According to Arkansas Game and Fish

Commission biologist Lee Holt, improper handling techniques can be very stressful to the fish and even result in high mortality rates, especially during the hot, summer months. "Due to the increasing number of tournament events, and considering that many of these events are held during the summer, it is imperative that emphasis be placed on taking better care of the catch. As most fishermen know, one of the most critical times for the fish is during the weigh-in," Holt said. "However, another critical aspect is often overlooked. How anglers handle the fish between catching and weigh-in is also very important to keeping bass healthy. While many anglers have boats with sophisticated live-wells, simply filling it up with water and aerating it may not be enough," he added.

Studies and science dictates that bigger fish are more susceptible than smaller fish to mortality associated with temperature changes and oxygen deficiencies, Holt explains. "That is, bigger fish die first, and what is every tournament angler after? You guessed it, the bigger fish," he said.

In an effort to better preserve the bass fishery, tournament anglers should be more mindful of their efforts to provide as much comfort as possible to their catches. If the angler takes great care of the fish while in their possession, the fish's chances for survival greatly increases.

As concerned anglers, what can they do, Holt asks? "Believe it or not, you have many options. First of all, start with ensuring that your live-wells function properly. Next, provide the fish with fresh water every couple of hours, by simply doing a water exchange. Furthermore, plan ahead, and freeze a couple of half-gallon milk jugs, or similar type jugs to carry with you on your trip," he says.

By doing so, you will have an adequate amount of coolant to help regulate the water temperature within the live-wells. The jugs do not take up much space and are much easier to manage than bags of ice. Cooler water is important as it retains more oxygen than warmer water and slows down the fish's metabolism.

Non-iodized salt applied at a rate of 1/3 cup per 5 gallons of water can also be added to the live-well to help the fish maintain an osmotic balance. "When landing your catch, be mindful of the hot summer air. You do not like it, nor does the fish. Get the bass to your aerated, cool live-wells, pronto," Holt explains.

"If you absolutely must admire your "money-maker," do so while the fish is in the confines of the cooler water, not in the hot air. Lastly, if at all possible, schedule tournaments for the cooler times of year. Avoid the hot, summer days of July and August," Holt suggests.

There is no cure all for preventing fish from dying. However, with a little education, cooperation and participation, anglers can help ensure that their catch survives to bite another day.

FLW Tour Championship set for Lake Hamilton July 13-16



HOT SPRINGS - The 2005 FLW Tour Championship, which will award the largest monetary prize in professional bass fishing to one of 48 competitors, will be contested on Lake Hamilton at Hot Springs on Wednesday through Saturday, July 13-16.

The tournament will be accompanied by a free outdoor show with 140 exhibitors and special show pricing on items

ranging from bass boats to artificial baits, a prize drawing for a \$47,500 Ranger fishing boat, a country music concert and the distribution of free fishing items for children 12 and under.

"The Forrest L. Wood Championship and Outdoor Show has something for everyone, from the die-hard fishing fanatic to the casual angler who wets a line once or twice a year," said Dave Washburn, communications director for FLW Outdoors, which stages the FLW tour and championship. "It's an experience people cherish for many years to come," Washburn added, "and it's a great place for children to meet some tremendous role models."

Competing for the first-place prize of \$500,000 in the \$1.5-million bass tournament will be the top 48 professional fishermen who have competed in this year's FLW tournaments. On the first two days of the championship they will compete head-to-head in a seeded-bracket format to narrow the field to 24. The anglers will be seeded based on their final ranking in the FLW Angler of the Year standings. The total weight of fish caught over both days will determine which angler in each pairing advances to the semifinal round on the third day. The tournament's fish limit for each day is five bass.

In the semifinal round, the 24 remaining anglers will again compete head-to-head based on the

bracket, and the 12 advancing from their pairings to the final day of competition will be determined by the highest total weight of fish caught on the third day. The champion will be determined on the final day with the dozen remaining anglers trying to land the highest total weight for that day.

The fishermen will launch each day at 7 a.m. at the boat ramp at the Andrew Hulseby Fish Hatchery at 350 Fish Hatchery Road. Weigh-ins will be held at 5 p.m. daily in the Summit Arena at the Hot Springs Convention Center at 134 Convention Boulevard in downtown Hot Springs. The convention center will also be the site of the outdoor show.

Show hours will be 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. on July 13 and 14, noon to 9 p.m. on July 15 and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on July 16. All events are free and open to the public.

The Ranger Z-20 Comanche bass boat will be awarded during the final weigh-in on July 16 to one of 12 persons who have qualified in previous drawings. People registered for the boat must be present to qualify and to win. Four of the qualifiers will be drawn from entries submitted at the Allen Tillery Chevrolet dealership at 4573 Central Ave. in Hot Springs by July 12. During each of the four daily weigh-ins, there will be drawings to select two qualifiers.

Items to be distributed free on a first-come basis to children 12 and under accompanied by an adult will include 500 FLW hats and T-shirts on July 13, 500 tackle kits on July 14, 500 free tackle boxes on July 15 and 1,500 rods and reels on July 16. At 6 p.m. on July 15, a free country music concert will follow the weigh-in.

The show will include free seminars at 2 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. daily by such bass fishing legends as Forrest L. Wood (for whom the FLW tour is named), Hank Parker and Guido Hibdon.

Additional information on the FLW championship, including rankings and other information on the 48 contestants, can be found online at www.flwoutdoors.com.

Louisiana's Greg Hackney wins Angler of the Year title.

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AGFC honors former commissioner by renaming access on Bayou Meto WMA

CORNERSTONE - The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission last week honored former commission chairman Bill Bridgforth of Pine Bluff by renaming an access point on Bayou Meto Wildlife Management Area. The access will now be known as the Bill Bridgforth Long Pond Access.

Bridgforth served as chairman of the commission in his seventh and final year on the board. Former Gov. Jim Guy Tucker appointed Bridgforth to the commission in 1994. Bridgforth's term expired July 1, 2001.

Bridgforth is a lawyer in Pine Bluff and specializes in agricultural legal issues. He is a native

of Forrest City, where he learned hunting and fishing as a boy, chiefly in the bottomlands of the L'Angeuille and St. Francis rivers.

He graduated from Forrest City High School then attended Washington and Lee University in Virginia and the University of Arkansas, where he received degrees in business administration and in law. He is married to the former Julie Schroeder and has three sons, Shane, David and Patrick Bridgforth.

Bayou Meto is one of the largest state-owned wildlife management areas in the nation, encompassing 33,832 acres in Arkansas and Jefferson counties. To attract ducks, about 13,000 acres of Bayou Meto are flooded each fall, aided by a series of levees, ditches, water-control

structures and plenty of rainfall. In addition, two areas, Halowell Reservoir and the Wrape Plantation, are waterfowl rest areas.

AGFC night at I-30 Speedway benefits boating safety program



LITTLE ROCK - Game and Fish Night at I-30 Speedway will be held on Saturday, July 23. The special event will raise funds for boating safety educational work in Arkansas.

From each adult paid admission, Speedway officials will donate \$1 to the boating safety program of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission in memory of the late sprint car driver Carl Dean Farish. Farish was killed in a boating

accident. Mike Cora Marine is also helping sponsor the charity race.

Come early to see the agency's mobile aquarium, along with exhibits, demonstrations and other displays. Adults wearing any article of camouflage clothing will get \$1 off the regular admission price.

A special celebrity race will match first lady Janet Huckabee, Christina Muñoz and Anne Pressly from KATV Channel 7, Jancey Sheats and Tracy Douglas from KARK Channel 4 against last year's champion, traffic reporter Nora Wells. Gates will open at 5 p.m., and races will start at 7:30 p.m. I-30 Speedway is located at Exit #126 off Interstate 30.

For more information, contact the Steve "Wildman" Wilson at 501-223-6408 or the Speedway at 501-455-4567.

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