



The Black Bass Program was established to direct specific attention to Arkansas' most sought-after game fish: largemouth, smallmouth, and spotted (Kentucky) bass, collectively. The primary purpose of the program is to enhance black bass fishing opportunities for anglers through stockings, population monitoring and research, habitat improvement, and tournament assistance.

Oct – Dec 2005

The Commission's Black Bass Program (BBP) was busy with several activities over the last few months and had time for some vacation as well. A live-release boat was completed and used on Lake Ouachita to assist two bass tournaments in October, USA Outdoors big bass and a FLW Outdoors BFL Regional event. We constructed some large pens at Bull Shoals for our vegetation project and also expanded our plant nursery at Hot Springs. A site investigation was also conducted on Greers Ferry for future habitat work as well. The program assisted the Stream Team and the Arkansas Bass Association (ABA) with a trash clean up on the Arkansas River near Little Rock. We also assisted District 8 Biologists with data analysis on the spotted bass population in Lake Ouachita. We continued to meet with the Arkansas Bass Association (ABA) and the Arkansas B.A.S.S. Federation (ABF) Boards, and also attended a meeting with Missouri Fisheries Biologists in Theodosia, MO.

Tournament Assistance

In our continued efforts at bass conservation, the Black Bass Program has recently completed construction of a live-release boat that can be used by bass tournament directors to recycle their catch on Lake Ouachita. The primary purpose of the boat is to help recover and re-distribute tournament caught bass to different locations around the lake after a weigh-in.



New BBP live-release boat on Lake Ouachita

The boat itself is a 29' triple pontoon equipped with a 200hp Mercury motor. Mounted on the boat is a three-compartment bottom-dump tank that holds approximately 650 gallons of water, which means that it can safely hold up to 650 pounds of fish. The tanks are individually plumbed for filling and

also contain individual diffusers, which provide oxygen from a compressed oxygen cylinder. Funds to purchase the boat were provided by a \$10K grant from the FishAmerica Foundation. The Black Bass Program also matched the grant money in order to purchase and equip the specially designed boat and tank that were manufactured by Waco Manufacturing and Ketcher Metal Products in North Little Rock, AR.

Mr. Bill Barnes, owner and operator of Mountain Harbor Resort and Marina on Lake Ouachita, has graciously donated a covered slip at his marina to house the live-release boat. Tournament directors will be able to access the boat beginning this Spring after a brief consultation and review of operational guidelines.

The Black Bass Program was able to use the live-release boat at two tournaments on Lake Ouachita this Fall in an effort to test the systems and determine how the boat handles under a full load. The boat operated flawlessly during the two-day USA Outdoors Big Bass and FLW Outdoors BFL Regional tournament events in October. Fish were successfully recovered and re-distributed at random locations throughout the lake and out of the Mountain Harbor area. The addition of the live-release boat on Lake Ouachita should greatly help reduce the stockpiling of fish at this popular tournament destination and benefit the black bass population and the anglers who pursue them.

Habitat Improvement

In an attempt to provide larger, protected nursery areas for our aquatic

plants on Bull Shoals Lake, the BBP and District 2 Biologists constructed three large pens this Fall at two of our West Sugarloaf sites and another near our Oakland site. The lake level was down approximately 7-8 feet below conservation pool, which allowed us to access the large mud flats and construct these large pens that are each about three-quarters to one acre in size. These pens will be utilized in our 2006 planting efforts and should help increase plant expansion and the development of aquatic plant founder colonies in Bull Shoals Lake.



Newly constructed three-quarter acre pen at Bull Shoals for aquatic plant expansion

We also expanded our aquatic plant nursery in Hot Springs and now have the ability to grow approximately seven to eight thousand plants for use in our vegetation establishment projects.

The BBP and District 10 Biologist Carl Perrin conducted a site investigation on Greers Ferry Lake for some future vegetation work there. The plans are to use a new technique and try to establish water willow in certain areas of the lake that are suitable for widespread expansion.

Arkansas River Clean-Up

The BBP again assisted the Stream Team and the Arkansas Bass Association (ABA) with the annual River Cleanup. It was another very successful trash pick up along the Arkansas River near Little Rock in which several crews with boats picked up trash across from the Alltel access, in the Riverview Park area up Shilcotts Bayou, and at Murray Park. We wish to thank the ABA for initiating this volunteer endeavor and we hope that the angler support and effort continues to grow for this very worthwhile project.



Picking up trash along the AR River near Burns Park

Research - Lake Ouachita Spotted Bass

The BBP assisted District 8 Biologists Stuart Wooldridge and Brett Hobbs with an in depth analysis of the Lake Ouachita spotted bass population.



Several spotted bass have been collected by electrofishing over the last two years as well as tournament catches in an effort to obtain good age and growth data that could be used for computer modeling. Better management of this species on Lake Ouachita will be the result of this ongoing research.

Meetings

The BBP continued to meet with both the Arkansas Bass Association (ABA) and the Arkansas B.A.S.S. Federation (ABF) Boards to discuss bass conservation issues and future cooperative projects. We are working with both organizations to try and produce more of the "Keep Fish Alive/ Bass I.D." cards in the near future.

We also attended the annual meeting with Missouri Fisheries Biologists (MOARK). This meeting provides a forum for both states to come together and discuss border lake issues as well as White River basin issues. We provided a presentation on the AGFC's Black Bass Program and progress on the aquatic vegetation project on Bull Shoals.