



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.

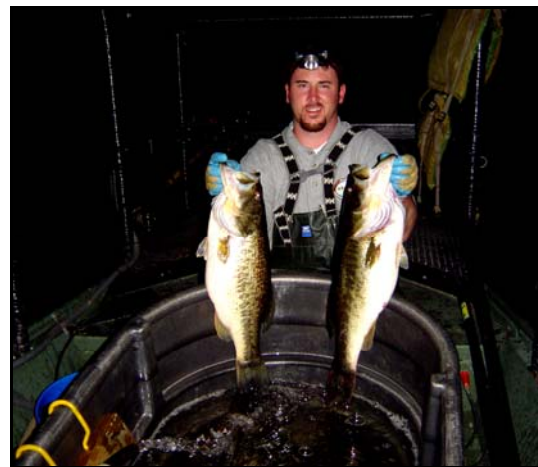
Apr-Jun 06

The Black Bass Program (BBP) has been busy this Spring with a number of activities. We spent time electrofishing and conducting largemouth bass research on a number of lakes. We also assisted with stocking fingerling black bass into lakes Ouachita, DeGray, and the Arkansas River. Spring is the time we are busy stocking up our nursery with plants for the summer planting season. We have already made trips to Greeson, Bull Shoals, and Greers Ferry this year to do some planting. We assisted with three big bass tournaments and gave a presentation to the Hot Springs Village Anglers group. We were also able to help out with a fishing derby @ Winrock Farms that had over four hundred kids.

Fish Sampling

The BBP made another trip down to Monticello to assist District 5 Biologists Diana Andrews and Jeremy Risley with some electrofishing and bass research. We had helped sample and

evaluate the bass population in March, but returned to collect and analyze some of the smaller, younger fish that we had previously overlooked.



Pair of nice Monticello bass!

We also assisted District 8 Biologists Stuart Wooldridge and Brett Hobbs with their annual electrofishing on lakes Ouachita, DeGray, Hamilton, and Cox Creek. This year is the first year of a research project that is designed to evaluate the introduction of Florida strain largemouth bass (FLMB)

into Lake DeGray. Tissue samples were taken from a number of bass from Lake DeGray during electrofishing to assess the genetic make-up of the bass population prior to the stocking.

The BBP and District 7 Biologists Drew Wilson and Les Claybrook electrofished Lake June and Grandview #1 in an effort to document the survival of elastomer-tagged feed-trained Florida largemouth bass that were stocked into these two lakes during the fall of 2004. The fish were five to eight inches when they were stocked.

Bass Stockings

I would like to begin this section by saying what a fantastic job our hatcheries have done raising bass this year and harvesting them at the appropriate time to maximize production.



ABBC members assisting with SMB stocking @ Ouachita

We'll start with the Tennessee strain smallmouth bass that were stocked into Lake Ouachita by the BBP, District 8, and volunteers of the Arkansas Black Bass Coalition (ABBC). All of these smallmouth were stocked out of the Spillway ramp and anglers were instructed to concentrate the stocking from Point #1 back to the dam in areas

with good habitat. A total of **227,000 smallmouth** were stocked this year! We will continue to strive for our stocking goal of 100K+ SMB fingerlings each year for the next several years in an effort to create a viable SMB fishery in Lake Ouachita.



Anglers assisting with FLMB stocking @ DeGray

As mentioned earlier, the AGFC began a project on Lake DeGray this year to try and establish some FLMB genes into the bass population at Lake DeGray. The project calls for eight years of stocking fingerling FLMB into the Brushy Creek arm, approximately 90K per year. The BBP and District 8 Biologists will continue to monitor the genetics of this bass population throughout the project. Lake DeGray has a 13-16" protected slot limit that will ensure that the majority of these fish that survive to adulthood will stay in the Brushy Creek area and have a couple of spawning seasons before they are legal to keep for a meal or for tournament anglers to remove from the area and weigh-in. The Andrew Hulsey Hatchery in Hot Springs, which produces all of the FLMB for the AGFC, had an exceptional year raising FLMB and was able to stock over **171,000 FLMB fingerlings into DeGray** this spring. A big thanks to Mr. Billy Huddleston, who recruited several local anglers to help out with the boat distribution of these fingerlings.



ABBC members ready to stock LMB @ Ouachita

The ABBC also helped us stock largemouth bass fingerlings from the Joe Hogan hatchery at Lonoke into Lake Ouachita. The fish were stocked out of Crystal Springs ramp and the ABBC members provided six boats to help us distribute the fish. The total number stocked was approximately **102,000 largemouth fingerlings into Ouachita.**

Habitat Improvement –



Water willow spreading in large pen at Bull Shoals

The BBP was able to begin planting in June again this year which should allow for another good growing season for our plants on Bull Shoals and Greeson. We were able to take approximately 1,000 plants to Bull Shoals and plant them in our larger pens that we built in the Fall of 2005. We also observed plants growing and spreading from our 2005 plantings.

The BBP tried a new technique for establishing water willow on Lake Greeson and Greers Ferry this spring. The new technique involves taking water willow cuttings and laying them out in shallow water while rolling wire over the top of them and weighing down the fencing with rocks. The water willow is stimulated to produce roots at its nodes where it had been cut and it will quickly root into the substrate. On Lake Greeson, after only two and a half weeks, the plants had started growing upward and were doing well.



Water willow cuttings taking root at Greeson!

Tournament Assistance

The annual Ford Dealers Big Bass Bonanza (FDBBB) on the Arkansas River was a big event for anglers in more ways than one this year. In addition to possibly winning over \$100K, anglers also had the opportunity to assist the AGFC with boat stocking over 100K largemouth bass fingerlings along the entire stretch of the Arkansas River.



ESPN filming prisoners, ABA members, and Lonoke hatchery staff seining bass from the Cummins Nursery pond

Earlier this spring the nursery ponds at the Department of Correction's Cummins prison facility were stocked with pre-spawn broodfish. These fish were donated from a Team Supreme tournament and two Arkansas Bass Federation (ABF) tournaments that were held in the Dumas pool. The Arkansas Bass Association (ABA) purchased minnows and diesel fuel throughout the spring fish production cycle.

On Thursday June 22nd, one day before the tournament began, AGFC personnel along with ABA members and prisoners from the Cummins unit seined the ponds and distributed the fingerlings onto fish hauling trucks that were to be stationed at each of the five tournament weigh-in sites along the river.



FDBBB Tournament Angler picking up his bag of fingerlings to distribute into the Arkansas River

On Friday, the first day of the tournament, AGFC personnel and ABA members began bagging up fingerlings in oxygenated bags for the tournament anglers to take out and stock into areas of good habitat throughout the entire river system. Each truck was loaded with approximately 20,000 fish and the fingerlings that were not taken out by the anglers were stocked with the days tournament catch at pre-determined locations into the river.



Some of the 115K LMB fingerlings bagged up and ready to be distributed by anglers

In all, approximately 115,000 fingerling bass were bagged and stocked along the entire stretch of the river. The brood fish for the Cummins ponds provided by tournaments held out of the

Dumas pool were returned and released at the Pendleton Access. Additionally, another 75,000 fingerlings that escaped our seining efforts were estimated to be drained from the Cummins ponds directly into Pool 2.

This cooperative bass conservation project between the AGFC, ABA, ADOC, and FDBBB tournament anglers was a huge success. Thanks to all our partners and tournament participants who showed their commitment and dedication to improving the bass fisheries in the Arkansas River. In addition, this unique cooperative project will be featured on ESPN's Bass Center and showcased to the nation sometime in August.

Kevin assisted Tournament Director James Arnold with the care and distribution of fish caught during the H&W Marine/Bob Robbins big bass tournament at Murray Park.



Big bass tournament @ Murray Park

In addition, Tournament Director Ronnie Heird used the pontoon live-release boat during his USA Outdoors Big Bass tournament at Lake Ouachita in April.

Presentations, Assistance, ATIP, Etc.

Colton attended several meetings with both the ABA and ABF boards this spring to discuss upcoming cooperative bass conservation projects and events. Kevin gave a presentation on BBP activities and projects to the Hot Springs Village angler club. Kevin also completed compiling all of the 2005 ATIP data and presented it to the District Biologists at a staff meeting in Yellville. The BBP also assisted with a kids fishing derby at Winrock Farms in which over four hundred kids participated.

Thanks to all the anglers who gave their time and provided boats and costly fuel to assist with our 2006 spring black bass stockings. This cooperative, black bass conservation effort of stocking fish by boat into areas of good habitat rather than stocking at a boat ramp greatly increases the bass fingerlings' chance of survival and addition into the population.