



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.

April - June 2007

The Black Bass Program (BBP) has been busy this Spring with a number of activities including: electrofishing for largemouth bass on a number of area lakes, boat-stocking black bass fingerlings into lakes Ouachita and DeGray, planting native aquatic vegetation at Bull Shoals, evaluating previous plantings at Lake Greeson, conducting an aquatic plant site investigation on Greers Ferry for an upcoming habitat improvement project, attending a Reservoir Symposium and Workshop in Atlanta, and meeting with a professor and graduate student at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) to discuss a future black bass research project on Pool 4 of the Arkansas River.

Fish Sampling

The BBP assisted District 8 Biologists Stuart Wooldridge and Brett Hobbs with electrofishing on Lake Ouachita at Buckville, Twin Creeks, State Park, and Spillway sampling areas.

As mentioned in our last newsletter, we are also taking fin clips from the fish at Rabbittail and Buckville in order to gain some baseline genetics data. This year is the first year of a project that involves stocking Florida-strain largemouth bass into the Rabbittail/Buckville area. In order to monitor any shift in genetic frequencies we

must first obtain this baseline data to detect any kind of change in the future in which we could attribute to our stockings.

The BBP also assisted the Fish Pathologist, Kelly Winningham, with some fin clip collection from Lake DeGray largemouth bass.



Kelly and Kevin taking a fin clip from a DeGray bass

Sites that were sampled on Lake DeGray included the Spillway/Iron Mountain and Arlie Moore areas. We collected baseline genetic data from the Brushy Creek area in 2006 prior to any stocking of the Florida largemouth fingerlings in this arm of DeGray. Once the fingerlings reach maturity, anglers will be able to remove the fish from the Brushy Creek area to popular weigh-in locations and released. Therefore, we want to monitor any genetic frequency

changes in these tournament release areas as well.

Bass Stocking

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.

We'll start with the Tennessee reservoir-strain smallmouth bass that were stocked into Lake Ouachita by the BBP, District 8, and willing 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.

Approximately 191,000 smallmouth fingerlings were stocked this year. The Andrew Hulsey hatchery crew has done an excellent job with these fish the last couple of years (227,000 in 2006) and hopefully we can have three more good years of at least 100K to get these fish going in Ouachita.



ABBC members assisting with boat stocking fingerling smallmouth bass in Lake Ouachita

The BBP also assisted with the Florida Largemouth Bass stockings at both DeGray and Ouachita. As mentioned before, both of these lakes are being stocked for eight years in an effort to determine the suitability of stocking Florida's into isolated areas of large reservoirs.

Lake DeGray received approximately 101,000 Florida fingerlings that were stocked in the Brushy Creek area.

Several anglers were there to assist the BBP and District 8 Biologists with the stocking of these fish into areas of good habitat.



Bass angler assisting with boat stocking fingerling Florida largemouth bass in Lake DeGray

Lake Ouachita received approximately 96,000 Florida fingerlings that were stocked in the Rabbittail/Buckville area and several members of the Arkansas Black Bass Coalition (ABBC) assisted the BBP and District 8 Biologists with this stocking effort.

The Joe Hogan Hatchery in Lonoke provided an additional 60,000 northern largemouth bass fingerlings that were stocked by the BBP and members of the ABBC into the Brady Mtn. and Denby areas by boat.



Buck Qualls with the ABBC stocking fingerling largemouth bass out of Brady Mtn. on Lake Ouachita

Habitat Improvement

The BBP and District 2 Biologists Ken Shirley and Stan Todd were able to do some native aquatic vegetation planting at

Bull Shoals in May, which is the earliest that we have ever been able to plant. Approximately 900 plants were planted on this trip. Several plants from previous plantings were observed and should have an extended growing season due to stable water levels throughout the Spring. We have our second trip planned for the third week of July if water levels cooperate.

The BBP and District 10 Biologist Tom Bly were able to select and GPS several potential sites for future water willow plantings on Greers Ferry. Anglers from the Arkansas BASS Federation were also able to assist with this process as well. The Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (BASS) has begun a More Fish Campaign and has started funding habitat enhancement projects through the state bass federations. The federation will receive the grant money and purchase the supplies while the BBP and District 10 Biologists will provide technical assistance and manpower as needed. The plan is to use PVC coated wire and water willow cuttings to get water willow established in areas that do not have any vegetation.

Tournament Assistance

The BBP's live release barge was used for a two-day tournament at Mountain Harbor on Lake Ouachita sponsored by the Forsgren General Contractors. Todd Gadberry, Marina Manager, was gracious enough to operate the barge for these guys for two days. The barge was also used at the USA Outdoors big bass tournament at Mountain Harbor as well.

The annual Arkansas Big Bass Bonanza on the Arkansas River has been postponed until August 10-12 due to extremely high flows on the river. Due to this rescheduling, the fingerling stocking of bass from the Cummins nursery ponds will not take place on the first day of the tournament as previously planned. We have decided to move forward with draining the two ponds with all remaining brood and fingerlings into Pool 2 as soon as river flows allow. Waiting until August to harvest the ponds will allow the water temperatures to get hotter and provide a chance for a turnover event with all the summer rains we

have been receiving. In addition, trying to harvest the ponds in August would cause more mortalities and we would have fewer fingerlings available because of cannibalism. As of right now the fingerlings are a uniform length at 2" and we estimate that we can still probably get 100,000+ bass fingerlings out of the ponds and into the river.

We want to thank all of the bass clubs who donated their tournament catch and allowed them to spawn in the nursery ponds. We will try again next year and hope Mother Nature will be more cooperative.

Arkansas River Clean-Up

Colton was able to use District 7's barge and assist with a trash pick-up on the Arkansas River. Fifty-four bags of trash and other assorted garbage were able to be removed from the river during this effort. The AGFC along with the Central Arkansas Master Naturalists and the city of North Little Rock were able to make this project a huge success and look forward to similar cooperative projects in the future.

Meetings, Presentations, etc.

Colton met with the Arkansas Bass Association (ABA), the Arkansas BASS Federation (ABF), and The Bass Federation (TBF) on several occasions to discuss various issues.

Colton was interviewed and participated in the Outdoor Hotline on AETN titled "Longbeards and Largemouths" that was aired in April.

Colton also met with a professor and graduate student from UAPB on a future research project on Pool 4 of the Arkansas River. The study includes a tag/reward study, creel survey, and stocked fingerling contribution to the bass population.

Kevin gave a presentation to several second graders at Lake Hamilton Elementary School.

The BBP was able to attend the 4th International Reservoir Symposium in Atlanta that was a very informative meeting.