



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.

July-Sept. 07

The Black Bass Program (BBP) stayed busy this summer with numerous activities. We were able to make two trips to Bull Shoals to do some vegetation establishment, assisted with some plant establishment at Greers Ferry Lake, and also assisted the Family/Community Fishing Program with some native plant establishment at the Mike Freeze Community Fishing Pond in England. The BBP assisted with the harvest of bass fingerlings at the Cummins Nursery Pond and participated in a SCUBA and snorkeling evaluation of smallmouth bass on Lake Ouachita. Largemouth bass age and growth data were analyzed from fish collected on Lake Millwood and we also assisted with some electrofishing sampling on Crooked Creek near Yellville. The BBP provided technical assistance to the Forrest Wood Cup (FLW) Championship on Lake Ouachita in early August, assisted the Arkansas Big Bass Bonanza held on the entire Arkansas River, and Colton provided a fish truck and technical assistance at the annual Cystic Fibrosis benefit tournament on the Arkansas River as well. Colton attended meetings with the Arkansas Bass Association (ABA), Arkansas B.A.S.S. Federation (ABF), Arkansas Black Bass

Coalition (ABBC), and also a meeting with the Corps of Engineers at Heber Springs.

Fish Sampling

The BBP assisted District 8 Biologists Stuart Wooldridge and Brett Hobbs with a Smallmouth bass evaluation on Lake Ouachita by utilizing SCUBA and snorkeling gear. The purpose of the sampling was to determine survival of stocked fish in our stocking zone from Point 1 to Blakely Mtn. Dam. Several Smallmouth were observed during the sampling with the most being fish that were most likely stocked this year; however, some larger yearling fish were also observed.



Evaluating smallmouth survival on Lake Ouachita

The BBP also assisted District 2 Biologists Ken Shirley and Stan Todd along with Stream biologist Jeff Quinn with some electrofishing on Crooked Creek near Yellville. The purpose of this sampling is to evaluate the length restriction on Smallmouth bass as well as providing population estimates on other sport fishes in this popular stream fishery.

In the Spring of 2007, numerous largemouth bass were collected from Lake Millwood as part of our standard springtime electrofishing and a portion of these fish were used to perform an age & growth analysis. Results from the age & growth analysis will assist with the evaluation of the current 16 inch minimum length restriction on the lake.

The BBP assisted the Joe Hogan Hatchery crew with the harvest of some largemouth bass fingerlings from the Cummins nursery pond. A graduate student at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) is conducting a research project on the contribution of stocked fingerling bass to the bass population in Pool 4 of the Arkansas River. Approximately six thousand fish were harvested for this study and the remainder of the bass fingerlings were released directly into Pool 2.

Aquatic Vegetation Planting

We were able to plant at Bull Shoals on two occasions this Summer and our plants seem to be doing really well inside our pens.



Nursery pen full of American pondweed at Bull Shoals

We also are beginning to see some expansion of plants outside of our pens to other parts of the lake, up to a mile from our original planting locations. The relatively stable water levels throughout the Spring and Summer have really helped the plants to flourish.



American pondweed establishing one mile from pens at Bull Shoals

The BBP was also able to assist the Arkansas B.A.S.S. Federation with a vegetation establishment project on Greers Ferry Lake that is funded by grant money through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's More Fish Partnership Fund. The project's primary purpose is to provide habitat for sportfish in Greers Ferry Lake. The ABF received the grant money for materials and the AGFC provided technical assistance with manpower and equipment. The project involved planting Water willow (*Justicia americana*) utilizing a technique that we

have described before that involves obtaining water willow cuttings and rolling out PVC coated wire over the cuttings. The rolls of wire are 150' and twenty four rolls of wire were used during this phase of the project (3600'). Several volunteers from the ABF were present as well as a group of junior anglers that also participated in the planting. Three different areas of the lake were planted (Sugarloaf, Higden Bay, and the Heber Springs Recreation Area). The wire will be able to be collected when water levels allow and re-used next year.



Planting water willow at Greens Ferry

The BBP was able to assist the Family/Community Fishing Program with some planting at the Mike Freeze Community Fishing Pond in England. An emergent species of vegetation (Bull tongue) was used to provide habitat along the shoreline. This species will not impede fishing and will help to stabilize the shoreline and provide habitat for fish and wildlife at this pond.

Tournament Assistance

In early August, the FLW Championship was held at Lake Ouachita, and the BBP provided a fish truck for two days and assisted with fish care and the redistribution of these fish back to Lake Ouachita. The event was a big success with over 60,000 people visiting the Hot Springs Convention Center over the four day event. Scott

Suggs from Alexander, AR was the big winner who won the \$1 million dollar grand prize, Congratulations Scott! The Junior World Championship was also held at the same time on Lake Hamilton and the BBP provided a truck for this event as well.

The annual Arkansas Big Bass Bonanza was finally held after several postponements due to unsafe flows on the Arkansas River. The BBP coordinated fish release trucks for all five weigh-in sites that handled fish care and release of all fish back into the Arkansas River. Thanks go out to all who assisted with this event. The winning fish came from the Dumas pool at Pendleton and it was worth \$100,000!