



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 2009

The Black Bass Program (BBP) has been quite busy this spring with a number of activities including standard springtime electrofishing for black basses on numerous waterbodies, tagging and stocking Ouachita-strain smallmouth bass, boat stocking reservoir-strain smallmouth and Florida largemouth bass, and assisting with several bass tournaments.

Bass Sampling



BBP and Kelly W. electrofishing for black bass

The BBP was able to assist District 7 Biologists Drew Wilson and Les Claybrook with some of their standard springtime electrofishing on Bois d' Arc, Greeson, and Millwood this year. We saw good numbers of 2-4 pound bass at **Bois d' Arc** that appeared to be in good condition. This lake currently has a catch-and-release regulation on it for bass that we will be re-evaluating with this latest sampling effort.

Our electrofishing on **Lake Greeson** took place in the Rock Creek area and the lake was a little high. Kelly Wittingham, our Fish Pathologist, helped us out at Greeson as well. We saw good numbers of yearling fish from last years spawn which should provide some good fishing opportunities in the years to come.

The electrofishing at **Millwood** was somewhat of a wash, pun intended. Kevin went out with Drew in the Yarborough area and Colton and Mark West (extra labor) went up the river around White Cliffs. Fish were pretty hard to come by due to the increased flow and muddy conditions from recent heavy rains. The decision was made to return in the fall when water levels are more stable and do some fall electrofishing to evaluate the bass population at that time.

The BBP also assisted District 8 Biologists Stuart Wooldridge and Brett Hobbs with some **electrofishing on Ouachita and DeGray**. Kevin assisted Brett with some electrofishing in the Irons Fork arm of Lake Ouachita where the spotted bass were quite abundant, which was no real surprise. We

did see some nice largemouth too and lots of yearling fish were seen that indicated a good spawn from 2008.

Electrofishing on **DeGray** was conducted exclusively in the Brushy Creek arm on two separate nights. Our goal was to obtain four hundred fin clips from largemouth bass in order to evaluate the Florida largemouth bass stockings that have been taking place since the spring of 2006. A small piece of fin is all that is required to test the genetics utilizing microsatellite DNA extraction for mitochondrial DNA and each clip is stored in a separate container with ethyl alcohol after a length and weight is taken from each fish. Kelly Winningham, our Fish Pathologist, has contracted our genetics work through Arkansas State University (ASU) in Jonesboro. Bass of all sizes were seen in good numbers in Brushy Creek and the catch rate was over two hundred fish per hour.



Kevin with a couple of nice Greers Ferry smallies

The BBP spent a week at Heber Springs assisting District 10 Biologists Tom Bly and Matt Schroeder with some electrofishing at **Greers Ferry**. Lengths and weights were taken on all black bass species and a number of fish were sacrificed in order to conduct age and growth on the black bass population. Greers Ferry's largemouth bass population has had a 15" minimum length limit (MLL) in place since 1987 and our objective is to evaluate the growth rates of all three black bass species (largemouth, smallmouth, and spotted bass) and determine if the current length and creel

limits are still the best management option for the bass population at Greers Ferry. Kelly Winningham assisted us with our electrofishing and while there took fin clips in order to evaluate the genetics of the largemouth bass, collected largemouth bass virus (LMBV) samples, and conducted a fish health assessment on the Greers Ferry bass population. *Side note: Kevin was spotted toting a nice gobbler out of the woods on this trip as well!*

The BBP made a trip up to **Lake Maumelle** to assist the Urban and Community Fishing Program (UCFP) Biologists with some electrofishing. Clint Coleman (UCFP) went out with Brett Hobbs (D8) to sample one area of the lake and the BBP sampled another. Great numbers of fish were not seen; however, we were a little late (post spawn) in the season to see large numbers of bass in the shallows in order to get reliable data from our electrofishing sampling. We were able to collect several fish in order to do some age and growth work which should give us a good idea of how the population is progressing since the 13-16 inch slot was removed a few years ago.

Bass Stockings

Our hatcheries again did a fantastic job in producing black bass this year for stocking public waters!

The Andrew Hulseley hatchery again produced a good crop of **Tennessee reservoir-strain smallmouth** for stocking at Lake Ouachita. Several members of the ABBC were on hand to assist with the boat stocking of 164,700 fingerlings into areas of good habitat inside our stocking zone from Point #1 to Blakely dam. The water was pretty high, so these fish had plenty of places to hide.

The BBP also assisted with the boat stocking of **FLMB at both Ouachita and DeGray**. Lake Ouachita received its third stocking of FLMB in the Rabbittail/ Buckville area with 101,550 fingerlings being stocked. Approximately 298K FLMB have been stocked in this area of Ouachita in the last three years. Lake DeGray received its fourth stocking of FLMB in as many years

with 93,700 fingerlings being stocked into the Brushy Creek arm of the lake. Approximately 460K FLMB have been stocked in DeGray thus far. Both Ouachita and DeGray are being stocked with FLMB in these areas for eight years to determine the suitability of stocking FLMB into isolated areas of large reservoirs. We would like to thank all of the anglers that showed up to assist with the stocking of these fish into areas of good habitat.



Kevin stocking adult and fingerling smallmouth bass back into Ouachita and Caddo Rivers

The BBP assisted the Andrew Hulsey Hatchery crew with distributing some smallmouth bass fingerlings and brood stock back to the Ouachita and Caddo Rivers. Earlier in the year, Brett Hobbs (D8) worked a couple of tournaments on the lower Ouachita River to try and collect some SMB brood fish for the hatchery to produce some fingerlings for stocking. Also, District 8 Biologists collected some SMB from the Caddo River as well.

This pond was harvested and all of the brood fish were placed on a fish hauling trailer and each fish had a pit tag placed in it. Pit tags are very small, capsule tags that are placed just under the skin near the dorsal fins and have a unique bar code number that you can read with a scanner. Using pit tags allow us to document growth rates and movement of these SMB if they are collected again during sampling activities or for brood stock usage. Ten of the brood fish were taken back to the Ouachita River near Caddo Valley and approximately 6K fingerlings were stocked at the Highway 67 Access as well. Approximately 26 brood and 6K fingerlings

were stocked into the Caddo at the Arrowhead and Norman access sites.

Bass Tournament Assistance



The BBP spent three days assisting the **Women's Bassmaster Tour (WBT)** with their weigh-in at the Academy Sports in Sherwood. The tournament was originally scheduled for the Arkansas River; however, high flows and small craft advisories forced them to move the tournament location to Lake Maumelle. Anglers brought several fish to the scales on day one with the overcast skies, but numbers were down slightly on day two as the sun was high and bright. Only the top twenty anglers and co-anglers fished the last day and Paula Alexander from Georgia won the event on the pro side with a three day total weight of 27 pounds and 5 ounces.

The BBP assisted the **Arkansas Big Bass Bonanza** with their annual tournament on the entire Arkansas River. Five weigh-in sites were located at Fort Smith, Dardanelle, North Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and Dumas. Colton worked the weigh-ins at Pine Bluff and Kevin was at Dumas for this three day event. Thanks go out to the Charlie Craig Hatchery and the Joe Hogan Hatchery for supplying a truck and driver each day at Fort Smith and North Little Rock to provide fish care and release of all the fish weighed in. The fish are released in a different location each day to try and prevent stockpiling of bass near popular weigh-in sites. The Dardanelle State Park utilizes a live release trailer and/or boat to release the fish at Dardanelle.

Arkansas Tournament Information Program (ATIP)

The image shows a survey card for the Arkansas Tournament Information Program (ATIP). The form is titled "Arkansas Tournament Information Program" and contains several sections for data collection. At the top, there are fields for "Club Name", "Club Rep.", "Address", "City", "State", "Zip", and "Phone". Below this, there are fields for "Waters Fished" and "Comments". The main body of the form consists of a series of horizontal lines for recording the following information: "Date of Tournament", "Number of Anglers", "Total number of fish weighed", "Total pounds of fish weighed", "Number of fish 5 lbs. and over", "Weight of largest fish", "Number of fish released", "Number of Anglers who weighed in", and "Total hours fished during tournament". A small circular logo is located in the bottom right corner of the form area.

The Arkansas Tournament Information Program (ATIP) is a voluntary program developed by the AGFC in 1990 to gather statewide tournament weigh-in information. Information collected is used to calculate Fishing Quality Indicators (FQI) for lakes and fishing clubs participating in the program. Information generated from this data has proven useful to bass clubs and tournament organizers in planning future events. Other goals of the program are to develop useful information for District Fisheries Biologists in managing bass populations, and help provide an open line of communication between AGFC Biologists and tournament anglers.

It is an easy process for anglers to participate in the program. A postage-paid weigh-in survey card is available for participating tournament groups. An on-line version of the card is also available on our AGFC Black Bass Program website at <http://www.agfc.com/blackbass/>. This program would not be as successful as it is without the help and cooperation from participating clubs who are committed to bass conservation and willing to work with AGFC Fisheries Biologists to improve the quality of bass fishing in Arkansas.

The **2008 tournament data** has been compiled and the report itself is being updated. **Pool #2 of the Arkansas River was the number one ranked water body** this year according to the five fishing quality indicators. They are (1) percent success (percent of anglers who weighed-in at least one fish), (2) average weight of fish, (3) number of fish per angler day, (4) pounds of

fish per angler day, and (5) the number of hours it takes to catch a five pound or larger bass.

A total of 345 entries were received from eighty (80) different clubs that fished forty-six different water bodies in 2008. Approximately **70% of anglers were successful in weighing-in at least one bass**, compared to 77% in 2007. Anglers were most successful at Ouachita River (89%), followed by Pool 2 AR River (87%) and Hamilton (86%). **Average weight of bass caught by ATIP anglers was 2.19 lbs/bass** compared to 2.13 lbs/bass in 2007. Pool 2 of the AR River bass had the highest average weight (3.01 lbs/bass) followed by Millwood (2.97 lbs/bass) and Pool 4 AR River (2.78 lbs/bass). **Number of bass** caught per eight hour angler-day decreased slightly in 2008 from 1.82 to 1.61 bass/day. Anglers averaged the highest catch rate at Maumelle (2.49 bass/day), followed by Hamilton (2.34 bass/day), and Pool 13 AR River (2.06 bass/day). **Pounds of bass** caught per eight hour angler-day also decreased in 2008 from 3.88 to 3.53 lbs/day. Anglers averaged the highest total weights at Pool 2 AR River (5.56 lbs/day), followed by Pool 13 AR River @ Ft. Smith (5.06 lbs/day), and Arkansas River Pool 4 @ Pine Bluff (4.63 lbs/day). Total number of bass caught that were five pounds or larger increased from 314 bass in 2007 to 484 in 2008. **The average angler hours needed to catch a bass five pounds or larger decreased from 419 hours in 2007 to 231 hours in 2008. This is the lowest that this indicator has been since the programs inception in 1990!**

Presentations, Meetings, etc.

Kevin was Wild Man's guest on his Saturday morning "Call of the Wild" talk show on KARN. They talked about a variety of things including Father's Day, the Big Bass Bonanza, and bass management in Arkansas.

Colton gave a presentation to the AGFC Commissioners at the Commission briefing on the Black Bass Program (BBP). Colton also gave a presentation to the Batesville Rotary Club on the BBP and vegetation projects at Greers Ferry and Bull Shoals.