



*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.*

### Jan.-Mar. 2009

The Black Bass Program (BBP) was busy this winter with numerous activities. This is the time of year when we normally are in the office compiling and evaluating fish sampling data, writing reports, and attending scientific meetings. We also spent a good portion of this winter in the field assisting our Fish Pathologist with fish and tissue collection for some disease monitoring, participating in the eradication of northern snakeheads (Operation Mongoose) in eastern Arkansas, and assisting District Biologists with springtime electrofishing for largemouth bass.

### Fish Sampling



Kevin and Kelly dissecting fish for VHS analysis

As mentioned above, we spent a good portion of the month of February assisting our Fish Pathologist, Kelly Winningham, and Fisheries Districts 4 and 9 with collection of fish to be sampled for Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS). VHS is a

fish disease that was first discovered in the Great Lakes region of the U.S. and has the potential to have devastating effects on sportfish populations. The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) set up a monitoring program that state conservation agencies could participate in order to document the diseases' movement. The AGFC chose to sample several water bodies throughout Arkansas as well as all of our state owned fish hatcheries.

Body tissues that were collected for analysis included heart, spleen, kidney, and brain. Seventy fish of various species were sacrificed for these samples and the tissue samples were delivered to the fish disease lab at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) where they were processed.

Water bodies that we either collected fish from and/or pulled the tissue samples from included the following: Mississippi River, St. Francis River, White

River, Arkansas River (Pools 4 and 7), Big Creek, Fourche LaFave River, Frog-Mulberry River, Lake Dardanelle, and the L'Anquille River. All results to date have come back negative for VHS.



Northern Snakehead

As many of you probably heard on the news, the AGFC embarked on a monumental task during the third week of March. The BBP participated in the snakehead eradication project in the Piney Creek watershed just outside of Brinkley. This all began in 2008 when a farmer found a weird looking fish on the side of a farm road and brought it to the Brinkley Office for identification. AGFC Fisheries Biologist, Lee Holt identified the fish as a northern snakehead. After extensive sampling, AGFC biologists could only find these fish in the Piney Creek watershed so the AGFC came up with a plan to eradicate them from the watershed.

The original project had been scheduled for October 2008; however, two hurricanes dumped lots of water on Arkansas and that put it off until March 2009. Over one hundred and fifty people took place in this effort including personnel from the AGFC, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), and several students and faculty from the University of Central Arkansas (UCA). Over four thousand acres of water were killed out utilizing rotenone, which is a fish toxicant that is derived from a plant root in Peru. Both powder and liquid forms were used with the ground crews using powder and the helicopters using the liquid. This is a very complex system that is ever changing and it is not likely that we killed them all, but the intention was to make the effort to control their numbers so that a monitoring

program could be established and further action could be taken if the need arises. At last count, the UCA crew had documented approximately 700 snakeheads that had been killed.



Kevin with a nice Lake Monticello largemouth

The BBP again made our annual trip down to Lake Monticello to assist District 5 Biologists Diana Andrews and Jeremy Risley with their standard springtime electrofishing to help monitor the Trophy Bass population in this lake. The fish seemed somewhat scattered compared to previous years; however, we did see some nice fish. We also were able to assist District 7 Biologists Drew Wilson and Les Claybrook with their springtime electrofishing at Bois D' Arc lake near Hope. We also took fin clips for Florida bass genetic analysis. This lake currently has a catch-and-release regulation on bass and we will be evaluating this after all the data from the samples have been analyzed. We did observe several fish in the 2-4lb. range that appeared to be in good condition.



Kevin with a Lake Ouachita smallie

The BBP was able to get out on Lake Ouachita one night and do some electrofishing inside our smallmouth bass stocking zone (Point marker #1 to Blakely dam). We were able to collect one smallie that was approximately thirteen inches long. We plan to get back out on the lake and try and see if we can collect some more in an effort to evaluate our reservoir strain smallmouth stockings over the last several years. We encourage anglers to help us with the evaluation by contacting us if they catch a smallie on Lake Ouachita.

### **Cummins Nursery Pond Project**

The nursery ponds at the Cummins unit located in Lincoln County have been stocked with brood bass to produce bass fingerlings for stocking the Arkansas River. We would like to thank Jeremy Risley (District 5 Fisheries Biologist) for working with the following clubs in order to get them to donate their fish for this great project: Southern Arkansas Fishers of Men tournament, the Monticello Bass Club Open tournament, and the Monticello Bass Club tournament out of Pendleton access. We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to these clubs as well as the staff at the Joe Hogan State Fish Hatchery at Lonoke for obtaining the fish and hauling them to the ponds. We are also utilizing some Spawntex mats for the first time in the ponds to try and increase production. The entire Arkansas River will continue to benefit from this joint effort between the AGFC, Arkansas Bass Association (ABA), and the Arkansas Department of Corrections (ADOC).

### **New Fishing Tournament Weigh-In Center**



Lake Hamilton Fishing Tournament Weigh-In Center

In 2008, the Lake Hamilton Fishing Tournament Weigh-In Center was completed at the Andrew H. Hulsey Access. The 2,400 square foot pre-engineered steel building is the first to be built by the AGFC for tournament weigh-ins. The building has already been used by a few tournament organizations this winter and we hope that it will be enjoyed by tournament anglers for years to come.

Facilities include live-release fish tournament weigh-in equipment consisting of pre-weigh-in aerated life support tanks, stainless steel measuring sink, elevated stage, stainless steel weigh-in table, digital scales with remote display, 16ft dry-erase leaderboard, and post weigh-in fish recovery live-release trailer. This angler support station also includes interpretive informational/educational panels emphasizing fish identification and conservation techniques, restrooms, and fish cleaning station.



The building is enclosed and allows anglers to get out of the weather after a long day on the water. The building is plumbed with lake water for filling the aerated life support tanks and the live-release trailer. Fish can either be released back at the weigh-in site or loaded onto the trailer and taken to another location on Lake Hamilton to reduce stockpiling of fish at the access site.

This facility will be instrumental in bass conservation efforts on Lake Hamilton, providing for the education of fishermen in proper fish handling and release techniques. Development of aerated life-support tanks and a live-release trailer for use during tournaments will assist in decreasing fish mortality and provide for redistribution of fish to various areas of the lake. The provision of a fish cleaning station and restrooms adjacent to the fishing pier and boat ramp will benefit all users of the Hulsey Access area. In addition, interpretive panels and informational displays will emphasize fish identification and handling techniques in an effort to better educate the public in regards to Lake Hamilton as a sustainable fishing resource.

Total cost for AGFC to construct the weigh-in center was \$165,000. The Hot Springs Advertising and Promotion Commission graciously donated \$25,000 toward the project. Another \$6,332 was provided through a grant from the Fish America Foundation. FLW Outdoors also contributed \$200 through the Arkie Division of the Bass Fishing League.

**The facility can be reserved on a first come first served basis by contacting the Hot Springs Regional Office @ 1-877-525-8606.**

## **Meetings**

The BBP staff was fortunate to attend the meetings of both the Southern Division and the Arkansas Chapter of the American Fisheries Society this year. The Southern Division meeting was held in New Orleans and the AR Chapter meeting was in Bentonville and both the meetings were well attended and very informative. These meetings allow biologists and academia from different states and different agencies to visit and also give presentations on research that is going on as it pertains to Fisheries Management.

The BBP attended a meeting with the Lake Ouachita Citizens Advisory Group (LOCAG) at Lakeside High School. The attendees were given a presentation on Lake Ouachita fish sampling results, habitat improvement projects, and fish stockings that had taken place in 2008.

**And Don't Forget.....** fishing regulation public meetings are scheduled in May all across Arkansas to allow anglers to voice their opinions on proposed fishing regulations for 2010. All the public meetings will start at 7 p.m. and dates, locations and phone numbers can be found on the website at [agfc.com](http://agfc.com)

These public input meetings are part of the AGFC's fishing regulation-setting process. Staff members will provide suggestions and recommendations from both the public and the staff to the Commission's Regulations Committee. New fishing regulations will then be set by the Commission at its August meeting.