

20/21

The Division of Freshwater Fisheries
Management



Annual Review

Highlights from across the state

The Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management conserves freshwater resources through innovative management techniques to sustain healthy fish and wildlife populations, provides a diversity of fishing and other recreational opportunities, promotes stakeholder trust and increases appreciation of Florida's freshwater ecosystems.



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Message from the Director

We have all faced many challenges over the past year, but one thing that we've realized, is that like the resources that we work on, our staff are resilient and adaptive. We have all learned to work differently, adjusted to virtual meetings and learned to be adaptive to changing conditions. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought struggles, it also allowed The Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management (DFFM) to demonstrate our own resiliency as we worked through new challenges and continued to work towards achieving our annual goals.



With limitations on travel and the need to social distance, the last year saw an unprecedented number of Floridians getting outdoors. People reconnected with nature and many discovered the enjoyment of fishing when they picked up a fishing rod for the first time. Over the last year, DFFM staff have focused on a wide variety of projects ranging from lake management plan development, Shoal bass conservation, habitat restoration, fisheries data collection, fish stocking, public access, invasive species studies and social science projects. In this review, you'll find a few examples of these projects.

What's next for Freshwater Fisheries? The Florida Trophy Bass Project! This new initiative is focused on Florida being the undisputed Trophy Bass Capital of the World. In the coming years, more effort will be focused on producing, documenting and promoting Trophy Bass as well as increasing opportunities to catch Florida's biggest trophies. Biologists will be utilizing both proven and innovative management techniques to increase trophy bass opportunities while also conducting research to better understand Florida bass genetics and the ideal conditions needed to reach fifteen pound and heavier weights. Scan the QR code to view the teaser video for the project. Additionally, we will be reviewing Community Based Fishing programs to ensure they provide fisheries and resources that fit the needs of the surrounding communities. Now, read on to see highlights from the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

– **Tom Graef, Director of the Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management**



TrophyCatch

TrophyCatch, the FWC's premier bass conservation program, reached a new milestone, surpassing 100 approved Hall of Fame (HOF) catches weighing 13 pounds or heavier. These bass are the biggest of the big—true Florida giants. Florida largemouth bass grow larger than the Northern largemouth bass found in the rest of the country. Many state records outside Florida are the result of stocked Florida largemouth bass genes.

To celebrate this incredible achievement, Hall of Fame anglers were asked to participate in a survey to gather unique information about pursuing and catching Florida's trophies. In addition to the survey results, TrophyCatch teamed up with FWRI to analyze nine seasons worth of HOF bass entries to inform future research and management decisions.

While HOF catches were submitted from 23 counties across Florida, anglers in pursuit of the next HOF entry may do well by scouting waterbodies in the north-central part of the state. Clay and Putnam counties led the way, accounting for about 30% of HOF catches. Anglers dedicated to being first on the water or last to leave might be a bit dismayed to learn that only 12% of HOF bass were caught at dawn or dusk. Rather, the majority were caught during midday or afternoon. For anglers debating which lure to tie on—it's difficult to argue with the tried-and-true plastic worm, which accounted for 41% of HOF bass and surpassed any other lure category on the survey.



TrophyCatch



SWIFT. SILENT. SECURE.



Approved Catches	Lunker Club (8–9.99 lbs)	Trophy Club (10–12.99 lbs)	Hall of Fame Club (≥13 lbs)	Total
Season 1 (start October 2012)	131	53	1	185
Season 2	760	228	6	994
Season 3	1,362	365	17	1,744
Season 4	1,914	347	7	2,268
Season 5	1,396	264	16	1,676
Season 6	938	255	8	1,201
Season 7	863	263	12	1,138
Season 8	1,166	311	22	1,499
Season 9 (October 2020 through June 2021)	860	244	25	1,129
Total	9,390	2,330	114	11,834

2,444 ten pounds and heavier trophy bass approved into TrophyCatch!

TrophyCatch Top 10 Waterbodies				
Waterbody	Lunker	Trophy	HOF	Total
Lake Kissimmee	728	154	2	884
Rodman Reservoir	721	155	4	880
Lake Istokpoga	470	90	2	562
Lake Tohopekaliga	400	72		472
Lake Okeechobee	402	64		466
Kingsley Lake	184	137	18	339
Lake Placid	150	53	2	205
Lake George	168	32		200
Kenansville Reservoir	167	27	1	195
Lake Hernando	124	53	3	180

R3: Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation

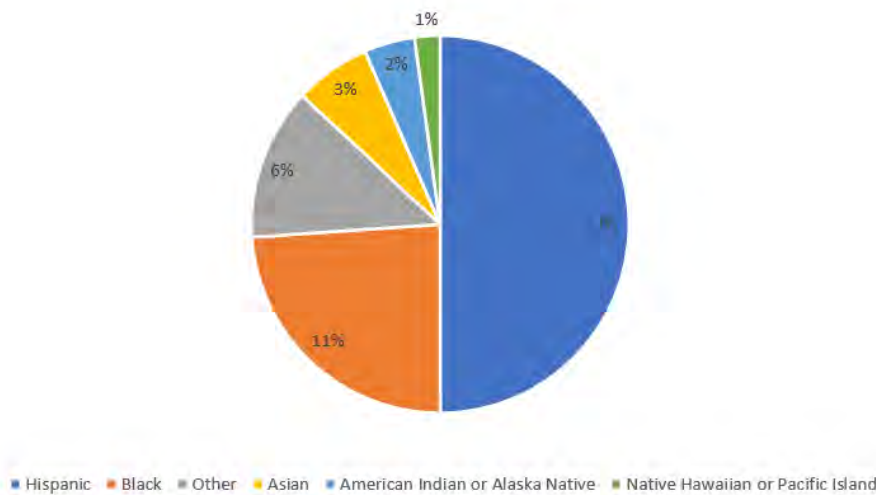
The Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management has several programs dedicated to introducing youth and their families to recreational fishing, like the High School Fishing Program, the Community Fishing Project, Fish Orlando, fishing derbies, the Florida Fish Art Contest and the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation R3 and Vamos a Pescar Grants.

High School Fishing Program

The High School Fishing Program wrapped up its fourth year with over 900 students across 90 schools participating in the program. Since the inception, \$52,200 in grant funding has been provided to high school clubs and students have alone received \$9,680 in partner donations. For the 2020-2021 school year, the first-place winner was JW Mitchell in New Port Richey, Florida, who received fishing rods and reels from our generous partner Pure Fishing. We thank them for their support in numerous FWC conservation efforts. For more information on the High School Fishing program, scan the QR code.



High School Fishing Program Demographics



R3: Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation

Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation R3 Grant

The FWC was awarded a Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation R3 grant with a focus on connecting the FWC's newly licensed anglers from 2020 with online resources aimed at providing them with the knowledge and skills to continue fishing in the future. The objective of the project is to determine the best way to interact with and provide relevant information to Florida anglers. The FWC has reached these anglers through a variety of different direct marketing methods like postcards (photo below), emails and in-store standing banners (photo to the right) at Florida Bass Pro Shops.



RECREATIONAL
BOATING & FISHING
FOUNDATION

R3: Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation

The Community Fishing Project

The Community Fishing Project is a group of designated Fish Management Areas (FMA) statewide in an urbanized setting that are intensely managed for angling opportunities. There are eleven community fisheries in the Southwest region in which a majority are in the St. Petersburg and Tampa areas. Community Fishing Project management in the region includes fish feeders, aeration systems, regular stocking of sport fish, fishing piers, free kids fishing events, improved aquatic habitat and water quality in a family friendly environment. Surveys were conducted that focused on outreach effort and informed management and stocking decisions. The first phase of evaluations identified community fishing resources as excellent fisheries with great management.



Fish Orlando

The FWC's mission through Fish Orlando is to create, conserve and promote convenient quality fishing opportunities in the greater Orlando area. To accomplish this, strategies based on applied science as well as maintaining elaborate communication with our stakeholders are utilized. Despite challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Turkey Lake boat loaner program ran year-round and exceeded all fish management goals. Anglers caught and released the second highest number (16) of trophy bass ever recorded in the year-round boat loaner creel.



Blackwater Hatchery

Recognizing 80 Years of Fish Production

Blackwater Hatchery has been operating for over 80 years and counting. Original construction of what was then known as the Blackwater River State Fish Hatchery and Game Farm began in the late 1930's as a joint project between the former Florida Board of Forestry and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture through the Civil Conservation Corporation program. Ten acres of sportfish production ponds were constructed as part of the project. The project was completed in 1940, and the facility was turned over to Florida's Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission with production beginning in August of that year.



Through the years, additional production ponds were constructed at Blackwater and today the facility has over 15 acres of ponds that are used to produce sport fish annually for stocking in Florida's freshwater resources. Scan the QR code for media coverage.



Hatchery Spawning

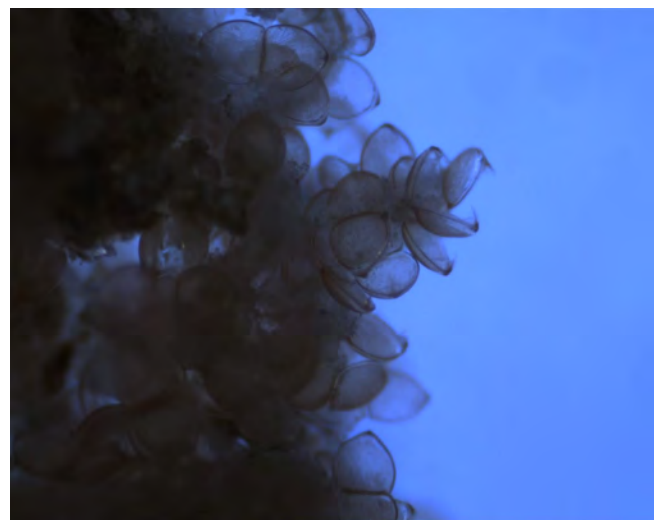
Blackwater is responsible for spawning all of the gulf striped bass and hybrid striped bass stocked by the FWC in Florida. The hatchery participates in an agreement with the USFWS along with Alabama and Georgia that focuses on restoration of the gulf striped bass populations in the southeast. Without DFFM's commitment to the conservation of gulf striped bass, this fish would no longer occur within its native range.



Florida Bass Conservation Center at Richloam Hatchery

Lake Trafford Mussel Project

Mussels are an essential component of ecosystem health and clean water because they act as a filtration system. When Lake Trafford was targeted for habitat improvement, staff thought that employing mussels could potentially help improve the poor water clarity and quality. Enter the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida with two grants to help researchers determine if mussels could be produced and have a measurable impact on water quality. Since mussels require a fish host to reproduce, biologists thought that bluegills might be helpful assistants. To enlist the fish's help, they placed both the mussels and fish in a specialized tank system designed specifically for the purposes of this project. The mussels released a mucus net that contained tiny baby mussels. The bluegill swam into the net, depositing the babies on their gills, the most conducive environment for their growth, with no negative effects on the fish. The results were excellent: biologists were able to produce 1,600 mussels with just 30 fish. The project marks the first time anyone has tried using native freshwater mussel restoration as a larger tool in whole ecosystem restoration in Florida. This is also the first time anyone has successfully propagated paper pondshell mussels. The first phase of the project has been successful thanks to funding by the Foundation; staff will be continuing to develop and refine these new innovative techniques over the next few years. With growing interest from other agencies, biologists are now working to scale up the project and create tens of thousands of mussels after calculating filtration rates to determine how many mussels will need to be stocked in Lake Trafford. They will also begin working to develop similar techniques for other native mussel species. Scan the QR to learn more about this project featured on the Cast & Blast Florida podcast.



Florida Bass Conservation Center at Richloam Hatchery

Florida Largemouth Bass Production: Out of Season Spawning

The Florida Bass Conservation Center at Richloam Hatchery has successfully spawned Florida largemouth bass out of season for the twelfth year in a row. This practice allows biologists to produce twice as many largemouth bass per year than other states' hatchery systems who can only spawn once a year. By spawning twice a year, the FWC is able to produce more fish without the added expense of collecting additional broodstock. Spawning at different times of the year results in larger fingerlings which improves stocking success. The 2020 out-of-season year class were stocked in Lake Trafford in the spring and in Orlando community fishing ponds in the summer.



During the 2020-2021 fiscal year, DFFM hatcheries stocked over 2.9 million fish in over 100 Florida waterbodies to maintain the Sunshine State's world class fisheries.

Total Fish Hatchery Production at Blackwater and Richloam Hatcheries: FY 2020-2021

Total Fish Hatchery Production: FY 2020-2021	
Bluegill Fingerlings	21,213
Redear Sunfish Fingerlings	7,150
2019 YC Florida Largemouth Bass Phase II - Fall Spawn	2,717
2020 YC Florida Largemouth Bass Phase II - Fall Spawn	6,001
2021 YC Largemouth Bass Phase II - Fall Spawn 2020	39,813
2021 YC Florida Largemouth Bass Phase II - Spring Spawn	16,185
2021 YC Florida Largemouth Bass Fingerlings - Spring Spawn	568,803
Striped Bass Hybrid Fingerlings	933,597
Threadfin Shad	20,300
2021 Channel Catfish Fingerlings	554,184
2020 YC Channel Catfish Sub-Adults	160,336
Triploid Grass Carp	2,113
Gulf Striped Bass Fingerlings	236,028
Inland Silversides	43,575
Gambusia affinis	300,000
White Bass	73,500
Total Hatchery Production To Date	2,985,515

Statewide Freshwater Updates

Statewide Black Crappie Regulations Review

The Florida Black Crappie Management Plan was completed in 2019, and the first action item in the plan called for a comprehensive statewide review of current regulations. A review team was established in June 2020, which was comprised of DFFM, FWRI and LE staff from across the state, along with participation from the University of Florida.

Survey and meeting responses indicated general satisfaction with the current condition of crappie fisheries. A pilot project studying the effectiveness of temporary condition-based size regulations has been proposed with the goal of prolonging fishery productivity when strong cohorts are observed. The review team concluded that no statewide size regulation should be implemented, and that most current size regulations should be removed.



Joe Livingston (pictured) is an engaged stakeholder who resides a mile from the Windsor Boat Ramp at Newnans Lake. He is an avid black crappie angler and travels across Florida for a good catch. Check him out on the cover of the Freshwater Fishing regulations booklet.



New State Record Flathead Catfish

Fisheries biologists certified a new state record flathead catfish weighing 69.9 pounds, measuring 48.5 inches long, with a girth of 38.25 inches, caught by Lavon Nowling from Santa Rosa County. Nowling caught his flathead catfish on a rod and reel using live bait in the Yellow River. Nowling brought his catch to the FWC's Blackwater Hatchery, where biologists weighed it on a certified scale. The previous state record flathead catfish was caught in 2019 on the same river. That fish was caught by Marvin Griffin and weighed 69.3 pounds.

Statewide Freshwater Updates

Largemouth Bass Tournament Economics Study

Some of the most important socioeconomic metrics of recreational fisheries are market activity metrics like contribution and impact. These metrics show how recreational fishing supports the local economy in terms like value-added, employment and total industry output. When this information is understood for specific fisheries or fishing events, it can better inform how regulatory changes or funding investments in these fisheries may generate additional economic activity in the local economy. This project was initiated during an atypical year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and biologists are planning to continue this research and expand it to other resources.



Researchers assessed the economic impact recreational largemouth bass fishing tournaments on one of the most popular bass lakes in the world, Lake Okeechobee. A series of surveys, fisheries dependent data and economic input-output analyses were used to assess how key economic metrics of labor income, value added, employment and total industry output were affected by angler spending in the Okeechobee region

Preliminary results suggest that expenditures associated with the 2019-2020 Lake Okeechobee bass tournament season generated over \$3 million in total industry output or sales revenue within the Okeechobee region, over \$1 million in total labor income, over \$2 million in total value added and generated 26 total jobs. Spending associated with invitational, members only, and open tournaments led to different economic impacts for each type of tournament. Notably, invitational tournaments generated less in total industry output than members only tournaments, while open tournaments generated the least amount of industry output. The differences in total industry output impacts for each tournament arise due to the differences in the number of anglers and total expenditures for each tournament type. Despite this, the ratio of economic activity generated by each tournament is similar, suggesting that each type of bass tournament will have a similar effect on the region's economy. This study will be replicated in the future on other waterbodies to further inform the economic impact of largemouth bass tournaments in Florida.

Lake and Habitat Enhancement

During the 2020-2021 fiscal year, freshwater fisheries biologists managed over 200 waterbodies spanning over 1.8 million acres to conserve and improve Florida's premier freshwater fisheries for residents and visitors alike.

Fellsmere Water Management Area

The St. John's River Water Management District and the FWC opened the long-awaited Fellsmere Reservoir boat ramp in Indian River County to the public in August 2020. The FWC contributed \$1.35 million dollars on enhancing 2,000 acres of habitat over a 2-year period, as well as stocking nearly 2 million sport fish, including 1 million largemouth bass. Biologists have been monitoring and evaluating fish populations, habitat and water quality in order to develop management strategies that will allow Fellsmere to be sustained as a world-class bass fishery. Since the opening of the boat ramp, Fellsmere has attracted many anglers, including legends like Shaw Grigsby, who submitted his 12-pound 7-ounce bass to TrophyCatch.



A Human Dimension Survey on Fellsmere anglers revealed interesting information about angling effort:

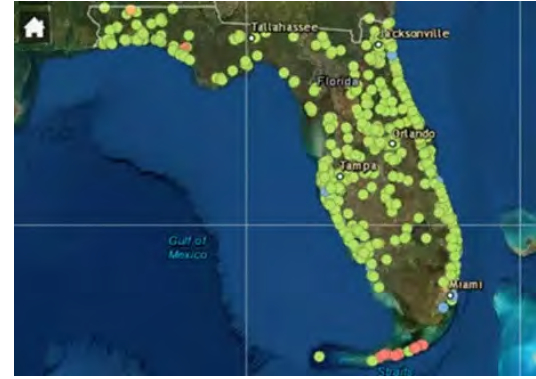
- 50% were non-residents
- 43% traveled overnight specifically for this fishing trip
- 53% would not have fished that day if they did not fish Fellsmere
- Most people chose to fish Fellsmere because of trophy bass (eight pounds and heavier)
- 91% indicated they never eat bass
- 87% thought anglers should NOT be allowed to keep a trophy bass
- 50% thought people should be allowed to keep small bass
- 59% support catch and release
- 73% do not support weigh-in style tournaments
- 81% do not think the FWC should ever provide length exemptions for tournaments

Fellsmere Water Management Area is a very healthy fishery and has quickly become the destination for trophy bass fishing.

Lake and Habitat Enhancement

Access Improvements

The Florida Pier Finder App was created by FWRI's Geospatial Analysis Section with assistance from Freshwater and Marine Fisheries Management staff. This web-based platform was created using a combination of aerial photography and local knowledge with the goal of improving fishing access by providing the public an easy-to-use informational tool that shows where they can fish from banks. Information such as type of fishing structure, restrooms and photos accompany many of the fishing sites in an interactive map. This innovative platform helps anglers find areas where they can enjoy diverse fishing opportunities. Providing shore-based anglers with easy-to-use location based information for fishing piers, bridges and jetties increases access and possibilities for new and experienced anglers.



Freshwater Fisheries staff are constantly working on improving access to Florida's waterbodies and identified a pier that needed a renovation. Staff repaired the Hurricane Lake CMI Pier this year which was imperative for improving access for anglers. Hurricane Lake is one of six Commission Managed Impoundments (CMI's). Hurricane Lake is a 318-acre man-made impoundment constructed in 1971, opened to fishing in 1973, and is designated as a Fish Management Area. A considerable amount of flooded timber remains, providing fish habitat. The lake has been stocked with largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish and channel catfish. Hurricane Lake is located in northwest Okaloosa County within the Blackwater State Forest approximately 12 miles northwest of Baker, FL.



BEFORE



AFTER

Lake and Habitat Enhancement

Newnans Lake Update

Newnans Lake is one of three major lakes in the Orange Creek Basin in north central Florida. The lake was historically a good bass fishing lake, but the largemouth bass population has declined over the last couple of decades. DFFM staff in the North Central Region have taken several actions towards improving the fishery on the lake.

- North Central regional and Florida Bass Conservation Center staff completed the third and final scheduled high-density bass stocking event in April 2021 where 338,703 fingerlings were released. In total, 956,672 bass were released over the three-year project.

- In collaboration with FWRI and AHRES, a pilot spatterdock (lily pad) transplant project was completed in March 2021 to see if this method is feasible to increase favorable bass habitat acreage in the lake. Sites are monitored monthly and as of June 2021, no substantial spatterdock growth has been observed thus far.

- A refurbishment of the fish attractor area in the lake was also completed. In May 2021, Alachua County contacted North Central regional staff about a tree that came down and was partially blocking the Owen Illinois Park ramp canal. In collaboration with FWRI, much of this tree was able to be used to refurbish the fish attractor area off Palm Point with 60 brush/block units deploying.



Fish Stocking, Sampling and Monitoring

The Long-Term Monitoring Project began in 2006 and consists of biologists researching, monitoring and recording the long-term history and trends of Florida's freshwater fish populations. This long standing and sought after data set provides biologists information that can then be used to assess the overall health of resources, direct research efforts and make management decisions.

Core Long-Term Monitoring Waterbodies

Big Henderson Lake
Blue Cypress Lake
Crescent Lake
Johns Lake
L-67A
Lake Apopka
Lake Dorr
Lake George
Lake Griffin
Lake Harris
Lake Istokpoga
Lake Kissimmee
Lake Minneola
Lake Monroe
Lake Ocklawaha

Lake Okeechobee
Lake Okeechobee Rim Canal
Lake Panasoffkee
Lake Poinsett
Lake Talquin
Lake Tarpon
Lake Tohopekaliga
Lake Trafford
Lake Washington
Lake Weir
Lake Weohyakapka
Lochloosa Lake
Newnans Lake
Orange Lake
Santa Fe Lake

Fish Stocking, Sampling and Monitoring

Homosassa River Research Project

The final year of the Homosassa River Research Project was funded by grants from the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida. The overall goal was to investigate possible causes of seasonal shifts in fish abundance in the Homosassa River, which is a freshwater spring-fed system that flows into the Gulf of Mexico. The project examined fish movement, water quality parameters and habitat use of largemouth bass, redear sunfish, common snook and gray snapper. Biologists used acoustic telemetry, electrofishing, habitat assessments, mark-recapture techniques and water quality measurements to examine fish species' interactions, distribution and movement in the river. Electrofishing data showed that freshwater fish abundance in backwater habitats were two times greater than the main river.



A seasonal shift in distribution between winter and summer was not apparent. Electrofishing results showed that marine fishes were nine times more abundant during winter months than during summer months. The increased abundance of marine fishes during cold periods indicate they are overwintering in the Homosassa River System. The majority of tagged marine fish left the river system in early spring, when sea temperatures rose to about the same temperature as the springhead. This suggests fish are utilizing the springhead's stable 75-degree water temperature for thermal refuge. The data collected during this project helps provide greater insight into fish species interactions, distribution and movements in coastal spring-fed systems.

Fish Stocking, Sampling and Monitoring

Chipola River and the Conservation of Shoal Bass

Shoal bass are a riverine species of black bass. In Florida, the only successfully reproducing population is found in the Chipola River located in panhandle. This limited range along with habitat loss and concerns over hybridization with other black bass species has resulted in this species being listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Impacts from Hurricane Michael in 2018 to the Chipola River watershed resulted in additional habitat destruction through siltation and sewage spills which further stressed this small population. Sampling effort showed a 90% reduction in Shoal bass population post hurricane. Hatchery staff at Blackwater are diligently working to develop procedures to successfully spawn Shoal bass at the hatchery.



Shoal bass have more specific habitat and water quality requirements for spawning than their largemouth bass cousins. Biologists are working to identify and replicate these conditions to induce spawning activity in hatchery ponds. Biologists genetically test all shoal bass to ensure they are not hybridized with the black bass. Successful fingerling production of genetically pure Shoal bass at the hatchery will enable fisheries staff to supplement and enhance this unique population through stocking and ensure it remains healthy and robust in the future.

Fish Stocking, Sampling and Monitoring

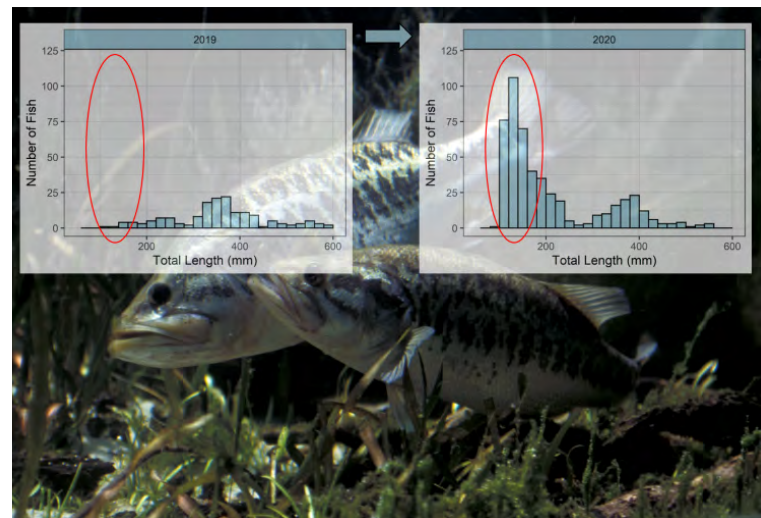


Stocking at Lake Trafford

Recent monitoring of Lake Trafford detected low recruitment of largemouth bass, therefore biologists stocked the lake with fingerlings from the Florida Bass Conservation Center. The stocked largemouth bass, from this year and a planned stocking next year, should help sustain the Lake Trafford bass fishery while habitat enhancement projects take hold to restore natural recruitment.

Lake Okeechobee Largemouth Bass Monitoring

Regular monitoring at Lake Okeechobee detected a strong largemouth bass year class that likely benefited from recovering submersed aquatic vegetation (SAV) in the lake. Recent sampling on the lake showed an abundance of new “young-of-year” bass born the previous spawning season. A good year class like this can help sustain a fishery for years to come and anglers will likely start catching this cohort during the next year. And with Lake Okeechobee’s fast growth rate, biologists can expect to start seeing these fish in TrophyCatch (eight pound minimum) by just six years old. South Region staff also began coordination and development of a Lake Management Plan and participated in the USACE Lake Okeechobee Systems Operation Manual. These plans will influence lake operations and management in the future, helping to continue the recovery of SAV and its ecosystem benefits. For general waterbody information, fishing forecasts, virtual tours, plant control operation schedules and annual workplans, boat ramp information and more, visit the “What’s Happening on My Lake” website by scanning the QR code.



Fish Stocking, Sampling and Monitoring

Nonnative Freshwater Fish

DFFM staff, in coordination with HSC Wildlife Impact Management (WIMS), have identified occurrences and prevalence of nonnative freshwater fish in the South and Southwest Regions. Recent reports indicated the presence of previously undocumented nonnative fish in several counties. Based on field investigations, staff identified several locations with reproducing populations of nonnative fish. Staff will continue to monitor and evaluate impacts to native species and increasing public outreach messaging in that part of the state to help inform citizens of the potential negative impacts of releasing nonnative species into the wild.

After numerous confirmed and unconfirmed reports of new nonnative fish species in the Southwest Region over several months, DFFM staff teamed up with HSC WIMS and FWRI Freshwater Fisheries Research personnel to investigate. Staff were able to confirm the presence of established invasive species' like bullseye snakehead and clown knifefish. Staff were able to remove approximately 50 adult and juvenile fish over the course of several months using electrofishing. After receiving permission from the retention pond owners, staff removed the nonnative fish in the pond in early bringing the known number of fish removed from the pond to 100. This is the first documented case of these nonnative species being established in the Southwest Region.



Fish Stocking, Sampling and Monitoring



Lake Apopka Fish Challenge

The FWC partnered with the Friends of Lake Apopka for the Lake Apopka Fish Tag Challenge. The contest ran from January through May and offered anglers the chance to catch a tagged fish in Lake Apopka and return the tag to the FWC for prizing from FOLA. Biologists tagged over 500 fish in a variety of species, such as black crappie, bluegill, redear sunfish and largemouth bass. The fish challenge was designed to determine if partner provided incentives elicit angler effort changes on Lake Apopka.

At the awards ceremony, FWC Commissioner Gary Lester presented a \$5,000 check from Bass Pro Shops to Christian Greico for catching the tagged "Jim Thomas" 12-pound bass and successfully submitting the fish to TrophyCatch. The incredible fish was caught during the Major League Fishing Toyota Series Southern Division, Harris Chain, Day 1 Weigh-In.



Fish Attractors

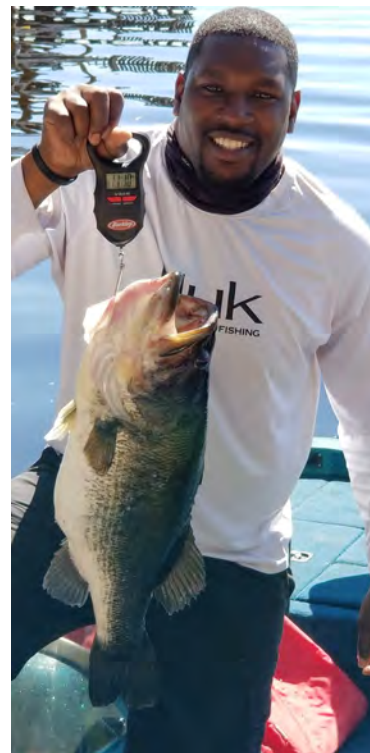
Fisheries biologists install fish attractors sites as a highly effective way to concentrate sportfish to areas where anglers can easily identify and catch more fish.

Fisheries biologists will continue to install fish attractors into waterbodies statewide. Scan the QR code for the FWC's fish attractor map.



Lochloosa Lake Fish Attractors

In January 2021, the owners of Lochloosa Harbor RV Park reached out to regional staff regarding the possibility of refurbishing the two fish attractor areas in the lake. They were cleaning up their property and had an abundance of green hardwood; one of the preferred materials for building attractors. By the end of February, biologists had acquired supplies and equipment, and with the help of Lochloosa Harbor and FWRI staff prepared and deployed the attractors. Fish attractors provide cover for sportfish as well as forage species such as insects, crustaceans and minnows that sportfish depend upon for food. Fish are attracted to brush piles or other structures in search of forage and protection from predators. As a result, attractors concentrate fish where anglers can catch them easily.



Fish Attractors

Lake Piney-Z Fish Attractors

Freshwater Fisheries biologists from DFFM and FWRI teamed up to improve angling opportunities on Lake Piney Z in Tallahassee. Biologists added 48 recycled plastic fishing structures to existing fish attractors in mid-November. All fish attractors can easily be reached from shore via the lake's numerous fishing fingers and are marked with a floating buoy. Lake Piney Z was recently named as a Top-10 "Mom-Approved" fishing and boating destination in the United States. Lake Piney Z remains a popular fishing destination in the Tallahassee area due to substantial shoreline fishing access and facilities. The lake has an abundance of fish species including largemouth bass, black crappie, bluegill, redear sunfish and catfish.



Lake Trafford Fish Attractors

Gravel bed fish attractors were installed at Lake Trafford around the pier and at two offshore sites. Early results are terrific; anglers quickly began catching limits of bluegill around the attractors. Scan the QR code to see how gravel is used to create the fish attractor habitats. The gravel is put out to add spawning habitat and provide food for sportfish by providing firm substrate that macroinvertebrates prefer over a soft lake bottom. The gravel is quickly and evenly distributed by washing it off a barge deck with a high pressure stream of lake water across the site and provide fish and aquatic invertebrates a place to hide.



Fish Attractors

Lake Walk-In-Water Fish Attractors

Fisheries biologists finished refurbishing Lake Walk-In-Water fish attractors in January 2021. Mossback Fish Habitat™ artificial trees of different sizes and shapes were used to offer habitat variety and provide “off-shore” structure for fish to congregate and anglers to target. Lake Walk-in-Water is 10 miles east of Lake Wales in Polk County. With help from Polk County Parks and Natural Resources, FWC biologists deployed 40 individual artificial trees at each of the seven fish attractor sites selected throughout the lake for a total of 280 trees deployed. Each of the seven sites offer more dense cover closest to the buoy as a safe haven for catfish, panfish and smaller bait fish to congregate, while sparser cover surrounds them for predators, such as largemouth bass and crappie.

