Issue 48 *July-September 2012*

The City Fisher

Newsletter for the south Florida canal and urban pond angler

Our Purpose: To identify excellent south Florida freshwater fishing opportunities and to provide urban anglers with relevant information that will enhance the quality of their outdoor experience.

Featured Fish: Florida gar

by D. Raver, Jr.

Size: This is the smallest of gars found in Florida, with a state record of 9.44 pounds. The **Big Catch** certificate program minimum is 4.0 pounds or 28 inches (**MyFWC.com/BigCatch**).

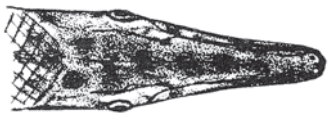
This newsletter is published by the **South Region Fisheries Management Section** of the **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission** (**FWC**), and is paid for in part by **Sport Fish Restoration** funds. To contact **The City Fisher**, e-mail **John.Cimbaro@MyFWC.com** or phone **561-882-5721**. You can also write to: John Cimbaro; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; 8535 Northlake Boulevard; West Palm Beach, FL 33412. You can visit us online at **MyFWC.com**. Back issues are available at **MyFWC.com/news/resources/columns/city-fisher/**.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

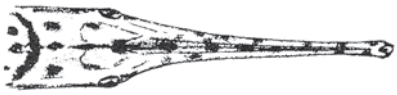
MyFWC.com

Identification: The elongated shape and toothy, narrow "beak" make this fish unmistakable. Also note the dorsal and anal fins placed well back on the body, the regular black spotting on an olive-brown background, and the heavy, diamond-shaped scales.

Similar species: The **spotted gar** is most similar, but has bony plates on the isthmus (throat) which the Florida gar lacks. The well-known **alligator gar** is much larger—reaching sizes of over 200 pounds—and is restricted to the panhandle. The **longnose gar**, which can exceed 40 pounds, can be identified by a longer and narrower snout than that of the Florida gar, as well as less abundant spotting, especially on the forward half of the body.



Florida gar



Longnose gar

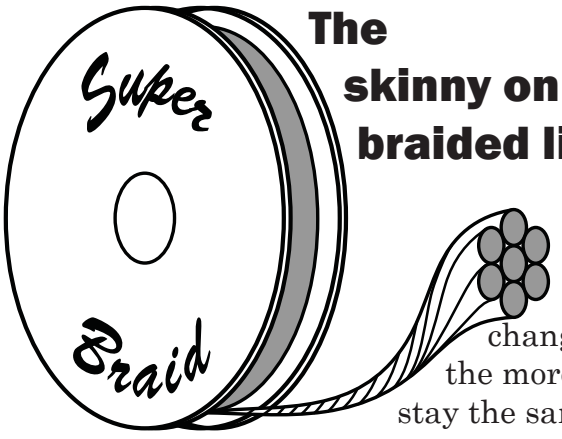
However, bigger longnose gar—particularly in brackish water—may have head profiles similar to Florida gar. In most of these cases, these longnose gar exceed the Florida gar state record weight, providing an easy indicator of their actual identity. The **chain** and **redfin pickerel**, while similar to the gars, have broader

and shorter mouths and feel very smooth when landed, lacking the heavy scale "sheath" that protects gar.

Angling qualities: Not many anglers deliberately pursue this interesting but much-maligned species. When they are caught, gar are usually landed by anglers using live shiners or minnow-imitating lures. Raw bacon also works well. The gar is difficult to hook because it may "mouth" baits for a while before actually swallowing them, and the very bony snout makes it difficult for the hook to grab hold. Gar do not jump when hooked, but larger individuals can put up a strong fight. This species often eludes capture because its sharp teeth can easily sever even heavy line unless a steel leader is employed. Gar are edible, although seldom eaten. The meat is reportedly quite good, and a favorite of the Seminole Indians. If you give this fish a try in the frying pan, though, don't eat gar roe as it is toxic!

Often accused of eating young bass, the Florida gar's diet does indeed include small fish of many species, but also consists of shrimp and crayfish. Considering that bass practically always share their homes with gar, bass would have been extirpated from most waters long ago if gar actually were as voracious of young bass as some anglers believe.

Gar possess some interesting biological characteristics. They are one of the few local species that have heavy **ganoid scales** (most familiar fish have **ctenoid scales** instead; see **The City Fisher** Issue 10). They also have a **spiral valve**, a lung-like airbladder that assists breathing; gar can gulp air directly and, therefore, can survive in areas of very low dissolved oxygen.



The skinny on braided lines

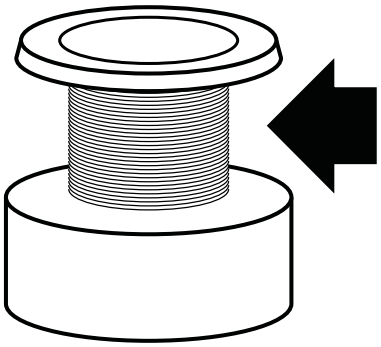
"The more things change, the more they stay the same!" I thought as I spooled some braided line onto one of my spinning reels for the first time. I've used monofilament for as long as I've been fishing. Part of my reluctance in trying modern braids comes from the fact that I got my start as an angler with ultralight gear and whisper-thin monofilament lines. Braided lines in those days were thicker and heavier than mono, and the only thing I'd ever touched braid for was backing on my fly reels. But today's braid manufacturing technology has brought modern fishing full circle.

At the turn of the previous century (the 1900s, that is), fishing equipment was already fairly sophisticated with the availability of geared reels and split-bamboo rods with guides. The lines of the time were made of silk, linen, or cotton. These lines required more care than most modern reels do, with regular unwinding and drying to keep them from rotting. When braided Dacron was introduced around 1950, it was a step up from these old lines. It was more maintenance-free and abrasion resistant, and Dacron quickly became the line of choice among most anglers. Even though nylon (and its daughter product monofilament) was introduced only a few years later, monofilament had a rocky start. Early monofilaments were too springy and stiff, and anglers stuck to their braided lines. Not until monofilament was refined and improved products like Stren hit the market did anglers switch *en masse* to mono. Monofilament was thinner, more abrasion-resistant, maintenance-free, and had better knot strength—plus, fish couldn't see it as easily. Mono ruled the roost until the 1990's, when advanced braids made from super-fibers such as Kevlar, Spectra, and Dyneema hit the market . . . bringing fishing lines full circle back to braid.

Despite reading all the hype about the new braids, however, I—and a lot of other anglers—remained perfectly happy with monofilament. In fact, even the anglers I knew who were fishing braid still used mono some of the time. Not until I needed to use much stronger lines for tough fishing situations, and was unhappy with the way heavy monofilament handled on my spinning gear, did I start to look at braided lines. I was very pleasantly surprised. The biggest advantage of modern braids is their

smaller diameter compared to monofilament lines. For example, I'm now doing most of my fishing with a 20-pound braid that has the diameter of only 6-pound-test monofilament. When I make a cast I still feel like the light-tackle angler I got my start as, with all the light-tackle advantages of smooth handling and longer casts. But when a big fish hits and tries to bully his way toward submerged brush, I've also got the muscle I need to turn him.

As a recently-converted braid user, however, I discovered that I had a few new tricks to learn. First of all, super-slick braided lines will slip on the shaft of the spool if they are wound directly onto most reels. To prevent line slipping, most manufacturers recommend putting a small backing layer of monofilament on the reel *first*, then tying and spooling on the braid. Some manufacturers even include foam tape with their lines to serve as spool backing. Loosely wound braid on a spool can dig down into itself and bind, so I also spooled up by applying more line tension than I do for mono.



Put a layer of monofilament reel backing on your spool before filling it up with braided line.

I also learned that I shouldn't use braid on cheap or older rods with simple, chrome-plated wire guides. Most modern ceramic or metal guides will handle braid without grooving, but if you're thinking of using braid on an old rod or one pulled from the bargain barrel, be aware of this potential problem. You can check for grooving by feeling inside the guides with your fingertips, or by wiping the inside of the guides with a Q-Tip to see if any fibers catch. Check the tip-top guide in particular. If your braided line is breaking unexpectedly, this might be another sign that it is grooving your guides—which are abrading and cutting the line in return. If this happens, it's probably time for a new rod. The same warning applies to older spinning reels, as well. Modern reels with roller guides will handle braid, but your old spinner with a fixed, chrome-plated line roller might start grooving. Watch for this, and if you see grooving it's time for a trip to the local tackle shop for a modern reel.

Chart comparing typical braided line diameter to equivalent monofilament line diameter. Braid is much thinner, offering improved line handling and spool capacity.

Braided Line Test	Monofilament Equivalent Diameter
10 lbs	2 lbs
15 lbs	4 lbs
20 lbs	6 lbs
30 lbs	8 lbs
40 lbs	10 lbs
50 lbs	12 lbs

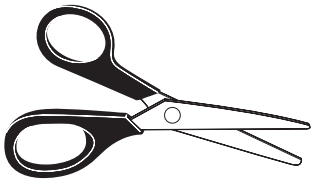
Another equipment-related factor to keep in mind is that even though that braided line might be the *diameter* of 6 pound test, it's actually 20-pound test. So it might cast just fine on a light rod and reel designed for 6-pound monofilament, but neither of those components may be able to handle 20 pounds of strain if you have the drag cranked all the way down and hook a large fish. You can break a rod or warp a reel spool if you don't select and use a rod and reel with common sense when you decide to load it up with braided line. This is more of a factor with older gear, but even with a modern outfit be sure to check the maximum recommended line test.

One of the few things I didn't like about the particular braid I was using was how limp it was. I do appreciate that suppleness when casting, but found that the line wraps my rod tip and tangles much more easily than mono ever did. I also found that when I get a tangle, braid welds itself into a permanent knot much more readily than mono. Braided lines can cost more than triple the price of premium monofilaments, and I didn't like having to discard thirty feet of good line because I couldn't untie a knot that appeared that far back on the spool. I've learned to be

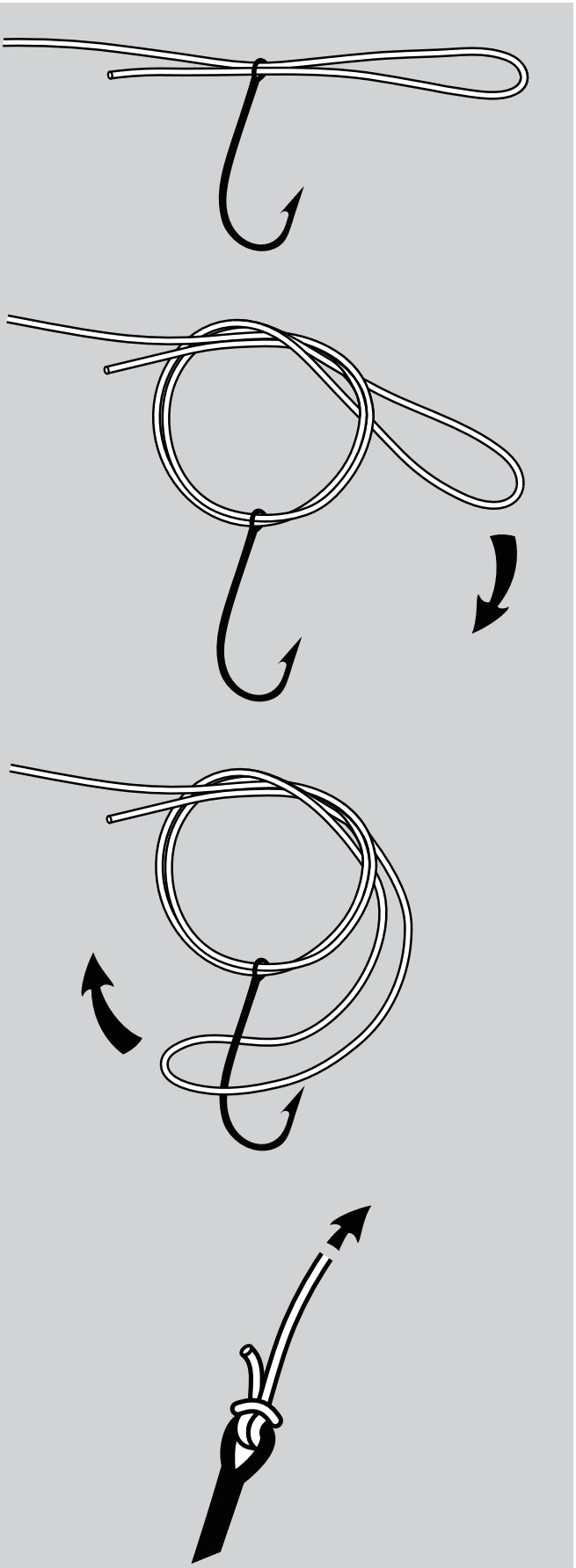
very careful not to accidentally pull a tangle tight when I get one. While somewhat stiffer braids are available, I've decided I still like the smooth way that limp braid handles on my reels—but I'm now much more careful with knots and tangles.

Despite its limpness, an advantage of braid in most situations is the fact that it has almost no stretch. Monofilament is quite stretchy, evident to any angler who's ever had to break a mono line off a very solid object such as a submerged stump. Braid, on the other hand, is tight as a wire—great for strike detection and hook-setting. In addition to the need for much stronger line which originally pointed me toward braid, I also needed to perform solid hooksets through thick, Texas-rigged plastics into tough fish mouths. My hookup ratio increased noticeably when I swapped mono for braid. With no stretch, however, braid can be less forgiving when fighting a fish compared to monofilament—though in my experience the extra strength of braid almost entirely offsets that disadvantage, except with especially big fish.

When I began using braid, I also had to learn a couple new knots. None of your old monofilament line knots will work with braid. Make sure you check that little folded paper that falls out of the box when you open your new line to see which knots the manufacturer recommends for its brand—they can vary. Thankfully, none of the knots I've come across are any harder to tie than the standard improved clinch for mono. And one of the easiest knots, the Palomar, works pretty universally among the various brands of braid. My only complaint is that it wastes more line than I'm used to compared to the improved clinch, though I also don't re-tie nearly as often when using abrasion-resistant braids as I do with mono. Note that when your knot or line shows fraying, it's time for a re-tie.

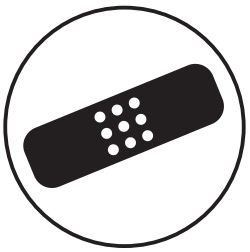


One minor knot-tying note: These new braids are *tough*, and the first time I spooled some up I literally couldn't find a pair of scissors in the house that would cut the stuff. If your particular brand requires it,



The Palomar knot is easy to tie and works well with a variety of brands of braided line.

invest a few dollars on a small pair of scissors or clippers designed especially for braided lines, to toss in the bottom of your tackle box.



And speaking of cutting, one thing to be cautious of is the fact that these super-slick braids can cut your hands much more readily than softer monofilament. If you snag a submerged stump, don't try to pull your lure free or break the line off with your hand! I wind some of the line around my aluminum net handle for heavy pulling. Try to keep this in mind during the excitement of landing a large fish, as well—don't grab the braid or wrap it around your hand.

One of the few disadvantages of braid is that it is not transparent like monofilament. I haven't noticed any decline in the number of strikes I get since I began using braid, but did have one interesting experience. Like many braid users, I still have mono spooled on some of my outfits for certain situations and lures. I had just made two perfect casts to the same spot with my usual "go-to" lure on my braided-line rig, no strikes. I then grabbed my mono rig with my "follow-up" lure and made an identical cast—and received an immediate, furious strike. This was only one fish . . . but it was a nine-and-a-half-pounder. Was it the line or the lure that made the difference to a savvy fish that had just watched two good casts go by? I still don't know, but it's made me stop and think. Anglers that want to offset this disadvantage of braid usually add a monofilament or fluorocarbon leader. The leader is usually at least two to three feet, longer for ultra-clear water or especially wary fish. Mono is cheap and works, but fluorocarbon is another modern wonder material that's practically invisible underwater and has outstanding abrasion resistance. The chief disadvantage of fluorocarbon is cost—even more than that of some premium braids—but not as hard on the wallet if you're only buying a leader instead of a full spool. Many anglers will use a fluorocarbon leader testing slightly *less* than the braid they're attaching it to, to increase the chances of getting at least part of their expensive leader back from a snag or breakoff. This also means you shouldn't lose *any* of your braided line to a snag—it's not cheap, either.

I'm admittedly a spin fisherman. For baitcasting gear, some of the features of braided lines such as limpness and small diameter make less of a difference, despite the fact that many of the earlier superbraids were designed (and advertised) strictly with baitcasting in mind. However, most of what's written here will apply equally to both gear types, and most modern braids work well with either spinning or baitcasting rigs. It doesn't take much online research to determine which brands are popular with either (or both) camp.

I've been using braided line for the majority of my fishing for a while now, and have continued to be pleased with its performance. Monofilament still has a place on my rod rack (I don't use anything except mono for bream fishing, for example). But for heavyweight fishing on gear that still casts and feels relatively light in my hands, braid can't be beat . . . unless a new single-filament wonderline hits the market, that is, and we see fishing line history add yet another twist.

Management of Holiday Park changing hands

by Cyndy Baker,
Broward County Parks and Recreation Division

Management of Everglades Holiday Park officially transferred from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to the Broward County Parks and Recreation Division on June 3, 2012. The Parks and Recreation Division worked closely with FWC to ensure a smooth transition. The county has signed an agreement with the current concessionaire, Bridges Everglades LLC, which continues to offer the existing concession services on site. Bridges operates the airboat rides, sale of bait and tackle, boat rentals, gator shows, fishing and hunting license sales, and other sundries. At this time, store operating hours remain unchanged. In the next several months, the Broward County Board of County Commissioners and the Parks

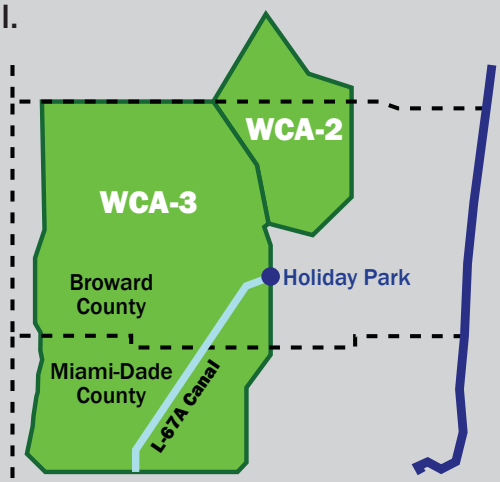
and Recreation Division will seek to hire a company to operate one or several concessions on a longer-term basis beginning in June 2013.

Sunrise at Holiday Park.

The county has already completed several basic renovations to improve the facilities, including constructing and installing an accessible ramp to the concessions, upgrading the restrooms, and renovating the wood decks and floating dock. We are working hard to ensure that none of these repairs will significantly interrupt existing services. The county has also begun the initial design and permitting process to convert the existing one-lane bridge to allow for through traffic both ways.

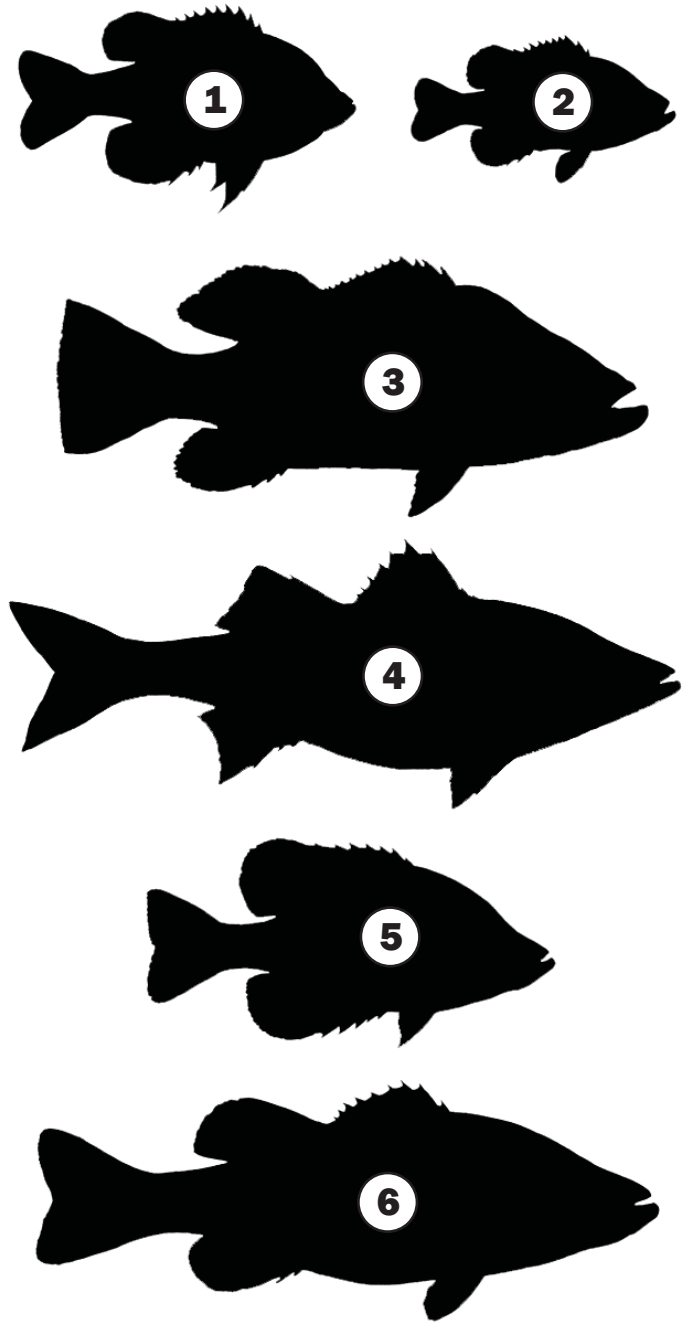
The campground will be closed temporarily until necessary renovations can be completed. Park staff have been present on the site since June 2012. All special events and activities require advance approval by park management. For other details, visit **broward.org/parks**.

Holiday Park provides access to Water Conservation Area (WCA) 3 and the L-67A Canal.



Florida sport fish quiz

Think you know your Florida sport fish? See if you can identify the following species just by their silhouettes. Images are roughly proportional in size to help you out. Note that an exotic species has been thrown into the mix! (Answers at bottom.)



(Illustrations after Duane Raver, Jr.)

Answers: **1** - Bluegill or Redear sunfish. **2** - Warmouth. **3** - Butterfly peacock bass. **4** - Striped/White/Sunshine bass. **5** - Black crappie. **6** - Largemouth bass.

Basic lake management

Many anglers live in a community that includes a lake or two they may have fished. Some are fortunate to be on a homestead large enough to have a fishing pond of its own. Still other anglers may simply wonder why their favorite fishing hole is such a good spot—or why another lake they tried seemed completely empty. All of these examples involve the principles of basic lake management. Below are six important components that can be part of a well-managed fishing lake.

1. Vegetation

The single most important factor determining the health of a lake and the quality of the fishing in it is vegetation. The wrong plants (non-native torpedo grass, water lettuce, water hyacinth, and hydrilla) usually do not provide food or cover for fish, and inhibit fishing access by excessive growth. Hydrilla is an exception in that fish love it, but this plant can rapidly "top out" and fill an entire lake, to the detriment of the fish (as well as anglers and boaters). An interesting side note is that when hydrilla is treated and eliminated from an area, fish often move elsewhere, leading to the misconception that spraying killed the fish. Beneficial plants (such as native bulrush, spikerush, pickerelweed, arrowhead, eelgrass, and pondweed) provide both food and cover for fish. In addition, most of these plants help stabilize the shoreline, reducing erosion. All of these plants also help to take up excess nutrients in the lake (one of the commonest problems in Florida waters), reducing the chances of fish-killing algae blooms or the rapid growth of undesirable plants. If good native vegetation is not present in a lake, it can be introduced by planting. Ideally, a lake should have 25-30% coverage of native plants. Non-native plants will need to be eliminated first, however, and maintenance will be needed to make sure the non-natives do not return and infiltrate the beneficial plants. *Aquatic plant line drawing is the copyright property of the University of Florida Center for Aquatic Plants (Gainesville). Used with permission.*

Spikerush

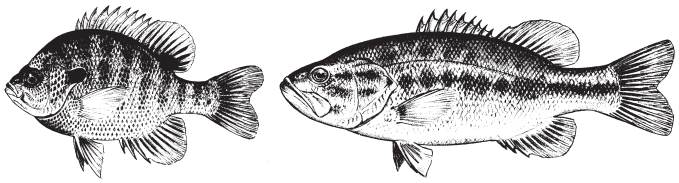
2. Water quality

There are a variety of factors involved in water quality, but the most important are nutrient level and dissolved oxygen. **Nutrient level** refers to the amount of **nitrogen** and **phosphorous** in a lake. While all plants need nutrients, excess nutrients can allow undesirable plants to grow very rapidly once they enter the lake, and can also lead to algae blooms. Native plants (above) will help take up excess nutrients, but homeowners can help by maintaining a 10-foot "no fertilizer" buffer zone around the lake to minimize fertilizer runoff into the water, and by not overfertilizing—a very common mistake. **Dissolved oxygen** refers to the oxygen content of the water, a critical need for fish health and survival. The best way to provide oxygen is naturally via native aquatic plants, but if these are too few or low-oxygen fish kills occur an aeration system (next page) may be needed.

3. Fish stocking

The very first suggestion that comes up when there aren't more or bigger fish in a lake is stocking. Unlike certain stocking programs in northern states for trout and other species, repeated stocking is not as important a component of Florida fisheries. Generally, stocking is only needed for a newly created lake that has no fish in it. FWC recommends a mixed stocking of 250-500 bluegill

and redear sunfish fingerlings per acre in the fall, followed by 50-100 largemouth bass fingerlings per acre the following spring. This will allow the sunfish to grow and reproduce, establishing their population before predatory bass are introduced, while at the same time providing suitably small forage for the newly-stocked bass. Channel catfish is another species that is popular to stock, providing additional fishing opportunities in a lake.

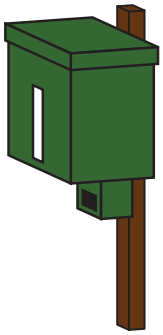


Stocking is usually only needed for new lakes with no fish in them. A mixed stocking of sunfish followed by bass will establish a balanced predator-prey population.

4. Fish attractors

Natural or artificial fish attractors are a quick and easy way to add structure to a lake, and don't require waiting for growth like native plantings do. However, they are not a substitute for plants, but a supplement to them. Fish attractors can be easily constructed from brush and cinder blocks. Oak and citrus trees are ideal, although commercial designs using man-made materials such as PVC pipe are also available. Fish attractors, as their name implies, will attract fish and therefore make good fishing locations. **Note:** A permit may be required to install a fish attractor, depending on the water body, ownership, and local zoning.

5. Fish feeders

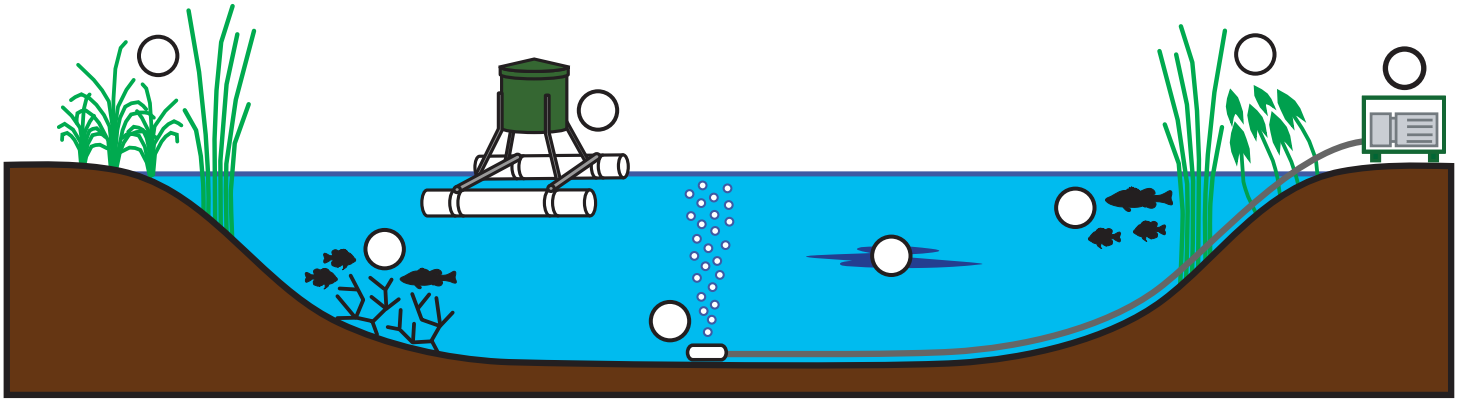


Fish feeders perform dual roles by providing food for fish, allowing them to grow larger more quickly, and attracting fish to a specific location where they are easy to find and catch. Various kinds of feeders and feed are available. In a public-access area such as a park lake, floating feeders (below) that can only be accessed by boat should be used in order to minimize vandalism. In more secure locations such as a private pond or gated HOA lake, shore-mounted feeders (right) can be used for filling and maintenance convenience. It is critical that over-feeding does not occur, particularly in smaller ponds; make sure all dispensed feed is being consumed and is not simply sinking to the bottom.

6. Aerators

If there is insufficient vegetation in a lake to maintain good dissolved oxygen levels, low-oxygen fish kills may occur. An air diffuser aeration system (diagrammed below) can help. These involve a blower pump on shore which provides air to an airstone assembly on the lake bottom, very similar to an aquarium aerator. Tying a float to the airstone assembly allows easy retrieval for cleaning. Water circulation as a result of aeration can also help reduce algae levels in a lake.

For additional information and resources for lake management, see:
MyFWC.com/conservation/you-conserve/recreation/pond-management



A well-managed fishing pond with all important components and enhancements in place. Remember—the types and amount of vegetation present will determine the health of the pond and the fishery in it.