

Selection criteria for stocking lakes and rivers in Florida:

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In a state as large and diverse as Florida, how do lakes or rivers get selected for stocking and who makes those decisions? To answer that question, you have to look at how the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) divides the state into management regions, based on major water drainage systems. Each of the five regions is staffed with Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management biologists who are knowledgeable about major aquatic resources in their region and are responsible for managing the fisheries.

Regional biologists determine which water bodies to stock based on recent fish population samples, creel surveys that determine what anglers are catching, habitat assessments and the wishes of the local community. This information combined with research findings and the outcomes of previous practical stocking applications helps determine when and where stockings should provide desired outcomes in terms of fish populations and angler satisfaction.

Most lakes are capable of replenishing themselves based on natural fish reproduction provided habitat is adequate and fishing pressure is within a sustainable range, which sometimes requires regulation management (e.g., bag and size limits). However, where habitat has been stressed by man-made or natural conditions, such as stabilized water levels in lakes that prevent them from flushing excess nutrients, and don't allow the shoreline areas to alternately flood and dry, or where sink holes have drained a lake for a while, or hurricane winds disrupted spawning areas and vegetation, stocking fish can restore a fishery more quickly than natural reproduction alone.

When evaluating a natural lake or river for stocking, the request for hatchery fish is based on analysis of long-term biological data that indicates augmenting native game fish populations will achieve a specific objective. Stocking programs for Florida largemouth bass, striped bass, black crappie, bluegill and other important native game species are carefully planned and evaluated. In other situations, specific waterbodies are stocked on an annual basis to maintain a healthy population for a recreational put-and-take fishery. Examples are Fish Management Areas, county or city parks where sub-adult channel catfish or sunshine bass are stocked each fall to produce high catch rates for recreational anglers.

