



Black Bass Management Plan 2010 – 2030: Update

*A long -term science - based and citizen - guided
program to ensure Florida as the
“Bass Fishing Capital of the World”*




**February 14, 2013
Orlando, Florida**

Largemouth bass is Florida’s most sought-after fish and the official freshwater state fish. What we can accomplish for bass fisheries (access, habitat, water quality, new opportunities) also improve black crappie, striped bass and their hybrids, panfish, catfish, and commercial fishing for non-game species. Abundant, diverse, and productive aquatic habitats also help support countless species of amphibians and reptiles, birds, mammals, and invertebrates. While this plan defines Division of Freshwater Fisheries (DFFM) Vision, it is an Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) integrated program to increase the relevance of our freshwater research (Fish and Wildlife Research Institute), habitat management (Division of Habitat and Species Conservation), fish management (DFFM), outreach (Office of Community Relations), and regulatory compliance (Division of Law Enforcement) programs. Many of our research and management programs are funded with federal grants from the Sport Fish Restoration Act.

The Commission approved the Black Bass Management Plan (BBMP) and directed staff to develop key elements in June 2011. This presentation is a progress report.

Sustaining Fisheries Values

- **Ecological**
 - Ensuring healthy lakes and rivers for all fish, wildlife, and people
- **Economic**
 - \$2.4 billion impact = 24,000 jobs
- **Social**
 - Providing positive alternatives for communities, families, and youth that adds to the quality of life for all of us



Our bass fisheries provide significant value to our state. Management for quality bass fisheries will serve as an umbrella that provides benefits for a wide variety of things.

Ecological benefits: Ensuring healthy lakes and rivers benefits many species of fish and wildlife as well as trophy fisheries. Providing necessary habitat and harvest protection to produce high quality bass fisheries will benefit lake, river, wetland, and watershed conservation.

Economic benefits: Documenting and increasing the economic impacts derived from fishing strengthen local economies, fund fisheries and lake management programs, and drive tourism and angling-related businesses. National professional bass fishing tournaments have huge economic impacts. Enhancing Florida's reputation will draw these events to our smaller towns and cities. These events garner worldwide attention attracting non-resident anglers to Florida throughout the year. Healthy lakes with vibrant fisheries also enhance property values and development potential, while justifying the need for sustainable development practices to protect aquatic resources into the future.

Social benefits: Communities benefit from a higher quality of life resulting from family and youth involvement in fishing. Programs such as Hooked on Fishing Not on Drugs[®] have successfully reduced the potential for youth attraction to dangerous lifestyles (www.futurefisherman.org/programs/hofnod/index.html). Encouraging youth and families to get outside and enjoy fishing improves health by reducing the potential for obesity and other threats to public health. Elements of the BBMP integrate with the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network.

Ecological, economic, and social factors are interrelated and underappreciated. The Black Bass Management Plan will elevate these important factors within the psyche of citizens, elected officials, anglers, educators, health practitioners, and the business community.

Cornerstones of the Plan

1. **Science-based** research to guide and evaluate management
2. **Public involvement** to understand and incorporate opinions, attitudes, and behaviors
3. **Adaptive Management** of ecological, economic, and social factors
4. **Promotion** of these factors to gain public support for lake, river, and watershed management



The BBMP is founded on four principles; good science, public involvement, adaptive approach in management (try, learn, and adjust), promotion of ecological, economic, and social values to gain wide angler, citizen, community, corporate, and intra-governmental support. Adaptive Management is an approach that attempts to strike a balance between competing factors or values. Many times the steps from start to finish are not known; however, with constant monitoring and adjustment, progress occurs.

While we have historically concentrated our efforts on doing good science, over the past two years we have worked harder on public involvement, being adaptive, and working with industry to promote our fisheries and accomplish conservation in new, exciting ways.

Goals

- Bass fisheries thriving in quality habitats
- More opportunities for quality and trophy bass
- Increase angler recruitment/retention
- Fishing quality and angler satisfaction are sustained
- Strong support from anglers and citizens
- Florida is recognized as the “Bass Fishing Capital of the World”



Primary goals of the plan are to manage aquatic habitat to sustain healthy fisheries. This means working with partners such as water management districts, Department of Environmental Management (DEP), counties, and cities, and various non-governmental organizations to ensure that water quality and quantity (stream flows and lake levels) are managed with fish community needs in mind. Retaining and recruiting anglers is important to maintain a strong stakeholder base for proper lake, river, and watershed management. Angler support also depends on maintaining high (>80%) angler satisfaction with the quality of their fishing experience. We must broaden our support base beyond anglers as only 10% of our citizens fish in freshwater. Tourism is critical to our economy that funds conservation programs, and maintaining Florida as the top destination for anglers from around the world is very important.

Partnerships and internal collaboration are important to achieving the goals of the Plan. Integration between Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, Law Enforcement, and Community Relations blending the main themes of the plan; People, Fish, Habitat, New Opportunities, has led to significant progress over the past twenty months. Engaging outside interests were essential as well.

Highlighted Progress

- Kissimmee Chain Hydrilla Management
- Largemouth Bass Regulation Review
- Medard Fish Management Area
- Shoal Bass Conservation/Chipola River
- Upper St. Johns River Reservoirs
- Lake Apopka Restoration
- Bass Tournament Impacts
- TrophyCatch



This presentation focuses on just a few major accomplishments over the past twenty months. On the Kissimmee Chain and other lakes where the exotic plant *Hydrilla* poses a management challenge, it is difficult to balance effective plant control methods with divergent public opinions. We have made significant progress in engaging the public during our decision making process and have applied this approach in other lake communities. Our staff is developing a public participation model to conduct a complete review of our existing regulations for largemouth bass and other freshwater species. This work will occur this year. Medard Fish Management Area was established late last year and reopened following extensive renovation of the reservoir and its fishery. Shoal bass are a species of black bass that require management in their limited range in Florida, the Chipola River. Conservation is being done by a broad partnership with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Southern Company, The Nature Conservancy, Georgia, Alabama, and FWC.

The following slides highlight the Upper St. Johns River, Lake Apopka, Bass Tournament Impacts, and TrophyCatch.

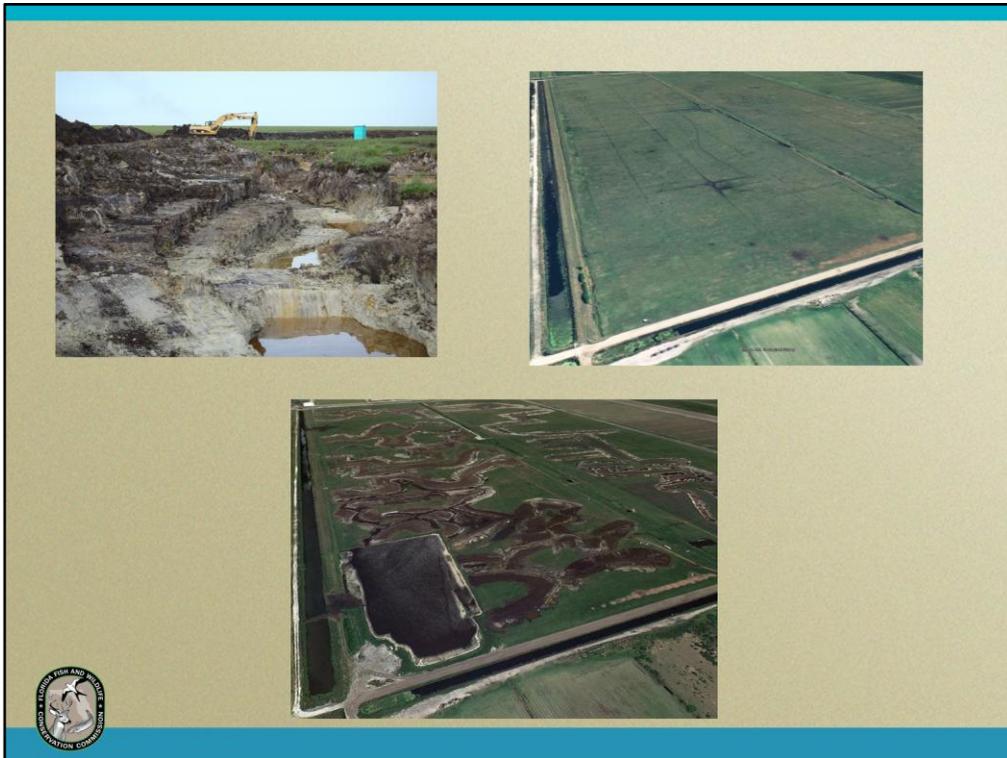
Upper St. Johns River

- 42,000 acres
- Estuary protection
- Minimum flows
- Fish/wildlife habitat
- Recreation
 - Fishing
 - Duck Hunting
 - Wildlife Viewing
 - Hiking
 - Bike Riding
 - Horseback
- \$20 million impact annually

During the early part of the 1900's, the vast upper St. John river marshes were drained for agricultural development. Runoff from these farms creates high nutrient inputs, harmful pulses of freshwater to the coast, and loss of base flow to the river.

The St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) is building a total of 25,000 acres of new reservoirs to store water that will protect St. Lucie Estuary from receiving harmful pulses of freshwater, help maintain flow in the St. Johns River, improve water quality prior to discharge, and support fish and wildlife along with related public recreation. Added to the existing 17,000 acres of reservoirs such as the famed Stick Marsh, this area will be a top destination for fishing, duck hunting, and wildlife viewing.

As landowner and project lead for the reservoir construction and restoration program, the SJRWMD has been an outstanding partner.



Using Aquatic Resource Enhancement funds from the Florida Legislature, FWC biologists contracted excavation of the farm to provide a variable bottom morphometry. Deep holes, channels, points, and islands diversify habitat complexity in what would otherwise be a flat, featureless lake bottom. Deep holes will sequester organic sediments over time and thereby reduce degradation of water quality and benthic habitat. Fisherman will love all the fish-holding structure that this project created. Shallow islands will be colonized by trees that were planted that will provide nesting and roosting sites for many species of aquatic birds.

The photo in the upper right shows the Fellsmere Reservoir before work and the bottom center shot is the after photo.



An aerial view of the entire 500 acre Fellsmere Reservoir Habitat Creation Project. Over 12,000 were planted and fish stocking will be done next year as the reservoir reached full pool. The habitat creation project cost \$470,000.

We are seeking permits and funding to create additional habitat on reservoir units being constructed this Spring.

Lake Apopka Restoration



We are also working with the St. Johns Water Management District, Department of Environmental Protection, Lake County Water Authority, University of Florida, Orange and Lake counties, and local municipalities to accelerate sport fishery recovery in Lake Apopka. Located just northwest of Orlando, the 30,000 acre lake is the State's fourth largest and was known prior to 1960 as the greatest bass lake in the world. Efforts to lower phosphorous levels and improve water quality and habitat have been underway since the 1980's; however, the lake continues to support a very low level of desirable aquatic plants. A 2012 legislative appropriation put the FWC as lead agency to develop additional projects that will help the fishery recover and increase public use. In fall of 2012, a list of projects was submitted to the legislature and funds totally \$4.8 million are scheduled to be released to implement these projects over the next year.

Lake Apopka Restoration Goals

- Achieve 10% coverage of native emergent and submersed vegetation within 10 years
- Enhance sport fishery by reducing sediments, increasing water clarity, improving public access, installing fish attractors, and stocking
- Evaluate and develop innovative technologies for water quality and habitat improvement



It will take significantly more than \$4.5 million to restore Lake Apopka. This first phase of projects will hopefully build public support for additional work that is needed to achieve restoration goals of expanding desirable aquatic vegetation, reducing impact of organic sediments at fish spawning and nursery areas, create juvenile and adult sport fish habitat in deeper areas of the lake, and evaluate what innovative technologies may help accelerate the recovery of the lake. The desired outcome of restoration is higher public use and economic benefits to the surrounding communities.

Bass Tournaments

- BASS and FLW assistance
 - Economic impact
 - January Open Event at Lake Toho
 - High School Fishing Teams
- E-Tournament with local clubs
- Major League Fishing – Lake Istokpoga
 - Different format with immediate release
 - FWC programs highlighted



We have been working with local governments and major tournament organizers to attract large events to Florida. These tournaments attract anglers from all over the world via television and internet coverage. Local business and community leaders also gain appreciation for the importance of providing healthy lakes and sufficient public access necessary to attract these events. All of us benefit when the community supports conservation because it makes economic sense. We held a meeting with FLW and the Florida High School Athletic Association to discuss developing a sponsored high school fishing team program that would be sanctioned as a sport. Progress continues to make Florida the fourth state to recognize fishing as a high school sport. We held events with local clubs using new protocols and technology to reduce stress from holding delayed-release tournaments during hot weather. These events went well and we hope the format gains popularity. Immediate release is the format of a new national fishing tournament that airs on the Outdoor Channel. Major League Fishing is composed of the top anglers in the world and the made-for-television format stresses immediate release and head-to-head competition. The producers filmed FWC staff on the lake talking about our management programs such as lake restoration and TrophyCatch.

TrophyCatch

*FWC in Partnership with Industry to
Conserve Florida's Trophy Bass*



TrophyCatch
My trophy swims in Florida

Our new angler incentive program to document and promote catch-and-release of trophy size bass launched October 1, 2011. This is a great example of a private-public partnership. We are engaging all sectors of the fishing industry; manufacturers of boats and tackle, retailers, large and local companies, media, professional guides and anglers, fishing associations, and tourism-related businesses and organizations.

While TrophyCatch is a powerful promotional property, it is based on conservation and sustaining our valuable bass fisheries. TrophyCatch uses sponsor-provided incentives to encourage catch-and-release rather than a regulatory approach.

Overview of TrophyCatch

- Incentives for live release/proper handling
- Provide important data for management
- Promote and generate support for conservation
- Develop public & private partnerships
- Promote Florida's world class bass fishing



We are concerned that the harvest of trophy bass for wall mounts may be high enough to reduce the frequency of trophy catches. Our reputation as a fishing destination, important elements needed to retain anglers, and significant ecological, social, and economic impacts could result if catches of trophy bass become rarer and rarer. It takes about 10 years for a bass to reach trophy size and if anglers kill more than survive that long, then our status as THE State to catch trophy bass will be lost. Our primary goal is to promote catch-and-release and proper handling of these valuable fish.

TrophyCatch provides anglers with prize rewards as incentives to weigh and measure their fish and submit photographs that document size. FWC biologists use the data to evaluate our fisheries management programs and learn important things about bass mortality, survival, and genetics. By engaging the public and industry in this effort to improve our science and management, we achieve a wider and stronger understanding of what is needed to sustain the quality of freshwater fishing. We can also work with the media to promote Florida's tremendous bass fishing and this generates significant economic benefits and creates the public will necessary to protect our lakes, river, and watersheds.

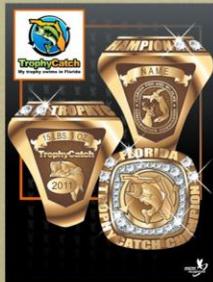
TrophyCatch Partners

- Bass Pro Shops
- Kissimmee CVB
- Phoenix Bass Pro Shops
- Bass Pro Shops
- World Fishing Tackle
- Mercantile
- Rapala
- Glen Lau Productions
- Sportfish Restoration
- The 3 Legends
- Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation
- FishPhoto Replicas
- Bienville Plantation
- Fishing Goods
- Retail
- Doors Fund
- Under The Bridge
- Bass2Billfish
- Sportsmen Adventures
- ODU Magazine
- New Wave Taxidermy

TrophyCatch Value
\$350,000



We have established partnerships with 25 companies that represent all sectors of the fishing and travel industry. Within the next few years, TrophyCatch has the potential to become a highly valuable sponsorship property. TrophyCatch currently has an sponsorship value of \$350,000. As the value grows, we hope to expand our outreach and marketing capability.



- Phoenix Boat/Mercury Motor
- Championship Ring
- Peter Miller Fishing Trip
- Guided Trips
- Private Fishing Trips
- Hall of Fame Banquet
- Replica mount discounts
- Gift cards
- Bass King shirts
- Rods/Reels/Tackle
- 8-10 pounds: \$15 value
- 10-13 pounds: \$100 value
- >13 pounds: \$1000 value

All this support has developed an impressive incentive program. All registrants are eligible to win a Phoenix bass boat powered by a Mercury outboard motor that will be drawn in October 2013. The angler who catches the largest bass will receive the TrophyCatch Championship Ring. All anglers who submit verified catches of 8 pounds and above receive incentives. The Lunker Club (8-10 pounds) receive \$15 value rewards with a chance to win \$50 gift cards and \$300 fishing trips. The Trophy Club (10-13 pounds) receive \$100 value rewards with a chance to win \$300 fishing trips. The Hall of Fame Club will be honored at an annual banquet for catching a certified bass over 13 pounds. These lucky anglers also receive \$1000 value rewards.

First Four Months

- Website hosted by World Fishing Network
- 1000 registrations (55% under 30 years old)
- 10% from 25 states
- 150 fish submitted (8.1 to 14.4 pounds)
- Oct-Dec: soft launch; Jan-April: full marketing
- Extensive media coverage
- One Last Cast with Shaw Grigsby
- NBC Sports PSAs



The TrophyCatch website is hosted by the World Fishing Network. We have 1000 people registered so far with 150 fish submitted. We did a “soft launch” for the first three months to test our processes and launched a strong marketing program in January. We are putting together a group of people representing various sectors of the industry to help us evaluate the success of the program, and improve our marketing to maximize conservation and angler recruitment/retention.

Osceola Challenge

- Kissimmee Visitors and Convention Bureau
 - \$10,000 to the Osceola County bass
 - \$2,500 to the guide

EXPERIENCE
Kissimmee



Managing for outstanding bass fishing over the next thirty years must include outreach to youth and families. The Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management has an Angler Education Program that is under the umbrella of the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network (FYCCN). From our primary facility at the Joe Budd Aquatic Education Center to FYCCN sites and partners located throughout the State, we conduct proven programs that are effective in helping youth make life-long commitment to outdoor recreation, conservation, and stewardship of our natural resources.



Besides the FYCCN sites, we have trained volunteers that conduct angler education programs throughout the State.



Over the past four years, our Fish Camp Program has expanded by 300%. Fish Camp is a week-long program where kids are emerged in fun activities that teach aquatic education, conservation and stewardship, safe boating and paddling, and of course fishing. The skills gained translate to both saltwater and freshwater angling. Our curricula has been applied to coastal programs where kids fish in saltwater.

The University of Florida conducted an evaluation Fish Camp and found that long-term gains in fishing skill, conservation attitudes, and fishing participation after Camp were significantly higher compared to youth that attend a one-day event such as a fishing derby.



Last fall, we were honored to host Governor Scott for a work day at the Florida Bass Conservation Center at the Richloam Fish Hatchery and help us conduct a fishing derby at Turkey Lake near Orlando. The Governor supports our youth programs and has helped us proclaim Florida as the “Fishing Capital of the World”.