

UNIQUE EXPERIMENT BY STATE

Lakes In Sandhills Wildlife Area Open For Fishing; Permit Required

(The following article, of interest to fishermen in this area, is reprinted from the May issue of "Wildlife in North Carolina." It was written by Bob Humphries, fisheries investigator for the N. C. Wildlife Resources Commission.)

One hundred acres of renovated fishing water! That's what Tarheel anglers have to look forward to when they fish the lakes on the Sandhills Wildlife Management Area at Hoffman. These lakes have been available for public fishing at various times during the 15 years since their construction as a public works project in the days of the CCC. However, there was never any management or care applied to the lakes other than stocking, and the fishing varied from good to poor.

Two years ago the Fish Division of the Wildlife Resources Commission took over the administration of the lakes and set up an intensive management and research project designed to improve and maintain the fishing. The fruits of this project are beginning to pay off.

The object of the project is to find out how to maintain a high rate of fishing success on a sustained basis. What commonly happens in small lakes of this type is that fishing success is good for a few years following stocking and then begins to fall off and becomes progressively poorer. The reason for this is usually an over-production of forage fish such as bluegills, which results in an overpopulation of the lake and stunting of the fish due to the inadequate food supply.

Thus the bluegills are too small to be caught and the bass too wellfed.

The only solution to this situation is to remove some of the

smaller fish either by natural or artificial methods. The breeding potential of bluegills is such that they will produce more fish than the lake can support. These surplus fish must either die, be eaten by other fish, or removed artificially—or a stunted population will result.

To overcome this problem, two ideas will be tried on the Sandhills lakes. One will be an extreme drawdown of the water-level of two lakes during the winter to concentrate the fish population and thus allow the predator fish (bass) to cut down the numbers of forage fish, bluegills. It is hoped that in this way the bluegills will not become too numerous for their food supply and will not become stunted.

Also it will increase the rate of growth of the bass and when the water-level is returned to normal, the bass, having to look harder for their food, will bite

more readily.

The other idea to be tried has already proved successful in a study made in Illinois. It consists of draining a lake completely every two years and replacing in the lake all fish of catchable size. Thus, by removing the smaller fish, overpopulation can be controlled.

The draining will be done immediately prior to the opening of the fishing season and the lake refilled immediately. Thus no fishing time will be lost. This has proved successful in the above-mentioned study but it remains to be seen if it will work in North Carolina.

The Sandhills Wildlife Management Area has eight lakes which will be open to fishing eventually. Six of these lakes have been drained, the rough fish in the streams feeding them poisoned out, and then restocked with bass and bluegills. Four of these lakes opened to fishing on

June 1, together with one of the lakes which has not as yet been drained. Experimental work done this spring indicates that fishing will be extremely good this year.

In order to determine the success of the management principles applied to these lakes, it will be necessary for the Wildlife Resources Commission to have a record of every fish caught in these lakes. For this reason a free permit is required to fish the lakes.

A fisherman must pick up a permit at one of two checking stations before going fishing and then must return the permit to the checking station after fishing so that all fish caught may be weighed, measured, and recorded. In this way an evaluation of the success of any particular method of management may be made.

In addition, each fisherman will be given a large colored

badge to wear while fishing. This badge may be seen at a considerable distance and will identify him as having a proper permit and license and will permit him to fish without being disturbed to check his permit. This badge must also be returned after fishing. Complete regulations governing the fishing at these lakes are available upon request from the Wildlife Resources Commission.

The lakes open to fishing during 1957 and their size are: Broadacres, 22 acres; Kinney-Cameron, 35 acres; Scotland, 22 acres; Crawford, 25 acres; Gun Swamp, 65 acres; and McKinney, 65 acres.

North Carolina is literally full of small lakes similar to the Sandhills lakes. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from the study of these lakes may be used to improve fishing in small lakes all over the State.

Little can be accomplished

without the full cooperation of the fishermen in helping the Wildlife Resources Commission gain the information necessary to the success of this project. In this way the fishermen of North Carolina will be helping the Commission in fulfilling its motto, "More sport for more people, equal opportunity for all."

Insect and disease control is important in getting high yields of any agricultural crop.

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