

Stocking Sportfishing Ponds

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Revised May 19, 1998

Because proper initial stocking of new or innovated sportfishing ponds produces the maximum number and weight of harvestable fish, it is one of the best management tools available to fish pond owners. Using a combination of recommended species, appropriate stocking rates and controlled harvesting produces a fish population with the correct predator-to-prey balance. A balanced population provides long-term satisfactory fishing.

Pre-stocking Procedures

Eliminate existing fishes before stocking your pond. If the pond is already inhabited, it is difficult to achieve the desired balance of predators to prey. Treat water in the pond and small streams flowing into the pond with a fish toxicant. This eliminates undesirable fishes such as carp, golden shiners, bullheads and minnows. Even desirable fishes such as bream (bluegills and redear sunfish) must be eliminated. If they reproduce before predators are stocked, the bream may become overcrowded, resulting in stunted growth

Rotenone is the most commonly used fish toxicant, It is widely available and inexpensive. Apply rotenone at least two to three weeks before the pond is stocked. There should be no water flowing through the pond at the time of the treatment. If the pond is partially filled, draw it down to ensure the toxicant does not leave the pond Treating less water also reduces treatment cost. Apply rotenone at a rate of two to three parts per million (ppm or mg/l). Three ppm equals about one gallon of rotenone or five to six pounds of five percent emulsifiable powdered rotenone per acre-foot. An acre-foot is the volume of water covering one acre to a depth of one foot. A two-acre pond with an average depth of four feet contains eight acre-feet of water. It requires eight gallons of liquid or 40 to 48 pounds of powdered rotenone to achieve a concentration of three ppm in the pond.

In streams, begin treatment upstream and treat the entire length of the stream at a rate of one quart of liquid or 1.5 pounds of powdered rotenone per 300 linear feet of stream. Rotenone is more effective at higher water temperatures and, if possible, should be applied when surface water temperature is above 70°F. At temperatures above this, rotenone detoxifies after three to five days. Detoxification takes longer at cooler water temperature. Place a small cage containing a few fish in the treated water for at least 24 hours to determine whether the rotenone has been detoxified.

Apply rotenone to water less than six feet deep by pouring a diluted solution into the prop-wash of an outboard motor or by spraying it over the surface with a hand sprayer Organic material decreases the effectiveness of rotenone, so disturb the bottom of the pond as little as possible. In deeper water, apply with a pump and weighted, perforated hose.

Obtaining Fishes

In Georgia, largemouth bass, bream and channel catfish are available at no charge for new or renovated ponds. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources requires the elimination of all existing fishes before stocking. Applications for free fishes can be obtained from county Extension offices or from Georgia Department of Natural Resources regional offices. Return completed applications to the appropriate Department of Natural Resources regional office.

Applications must be filled out by the pond owner and all information must be accurate. The estimated surface area of existing ponds can be obtained from local Soil Conservation Service offices or Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service offices. For new ponds, surface acreage is available from the design engineer or contractor. Accurate estimate of surface acreage are essential to determine the proper number and ratio of fish to stock. If the pond size is underestimated, available food supplies will be underutilized and an incorrect ratio of predators to prey may become established.

Fishes are distributed at public hatcheries from fall to spring. Although fishes are available for several months, ponds stocked earlier in the season are more likely to achieve balance than are those stocked later. Fishes are distributed from public hatcheries in the order that applications are received, so pond owners should complete and return the applications as early as possible. Bream and catfish fingerlings are available from fall to early winter. Bream stocked early in the fall will quickly grow to a size large enough to reproduce. Bream reproduction provides food for bass stocked the following spring. Ponds stocked with bream after January are unlikely to achieve a balanced population. In ponds stocked late in the season, there is not enough time for many of the bream to become large enough to reproduce early in the summer. Fishes may be purchased from commercial hatcheries at any time of the year; however, you will get the best results by following the described stocking plan.

Stocking Rates

To produce the best fishing possible, owners of new ponds are provided with an appropriate ratio of largemouth bass, bream and channel catfish. The stocking rate per surface acre is 400 bluegill, 100 redear sunfish, 50 largemouth bass and an optional 50 channel catfish. The depth of the pond is unimportant because all the natural food is produced within a few feet of the surface.

Catfish fingerlings are provided by state hatcheries to stock ponds already containing fish. The stocking rate for ponds containing bass and bream is 100 per pond or 50 per acre (whichever is greater), with a maximum of 1,000 catfish fingerlings per applicant. If catfish fingerlings are stocked in ponds containing adult fishes, they must be raised in cages until they reach a length of 10 inches before they can be released. This prevents predation by larger fish in the pond. The Department of Natural Resources does not provide large channel catfish for restocking, but large channel catfish may be purchased from commercial sources.

Ponds smaller than one acre are difficult to manage for bass and bream fishing. Only channel catfish are recommended for small ponds. Channel catfish ponds are stocked at a rate equivalent to 500 fish per acre for ponds smaller than one acre. In ponds larger than one acre, the rate is 500 catfish per pond or 50 per acre (whichever is greater). Channel catfish usually do not reproduce in sportfishing ponds and have to be restocked periodically.

Do not stock species other than largemouth bass, bluegills, redear sunfish and channel catfish. Other species are difficult to manage and often become overcrowded and stunted. It is not necessary to restock bass and bream in balanced populations. At the recommended stocking rate, channel catfish production does not reduce bass and bream production.

Picking Up and Stocking Fishes

Fish obtained from the Department of Natural Resources must be picked up at the appropriate fish hatchery. Bream and channel catfish are available in late fall or early winter and largemouth bass are picked up the following spring. The pond owner is responsible for providing appropriate containers to transport fish. Many pond owners lose fish during transport because of a poor choice of containers. The containers should be clean and of an adequate size for the number of fish picked up. Large coolers, plastic garbage cans and tubs are frequently used. Water to fill the containers is available at the hatcheries. Cover open containers with burlap to prevent the escape of fish and water during transport.

Transport fish directly to the pond. At the pond bank, slowly add water from the pond to water in the hauling containers until the water temperatures are equal. Do not add more than one-third of the volume of the container at a time.

Proper stocking greatly increases the chance of the fish population being balanced and producing long-term satisfactory fishing.

Georgia Department of Natural Resources Regional Offices

Calhoun Office (404) 624-1161
PO Box 519
Calhoun, GA 30701

Albany Office (912) 430-4256
2024 Newton Road
Albany, GA 31708

Gainesville Office (404) 535-5498
2150 Dawsonville Hwy.

Steve Cocke Fish Hatchery (912) 995-4486
Route 3, Box 40

Gainesville, GA 30501

Dawson, GA 31742

Walton Office (404) 557-2591
Route 2, Box 119
Social Circle, GA 30279

Waycross Office (912) 285-6094
PO Box 2089
Waycross, GA 31502

McDuffie Fish Hatchery (404) 595-1619
Route 1, Box 57
Dearing, Ga 30808

Metter Office (912) 685-6424
Route 2, Box 4-B
Metter, GA 31439

Fort Valley Office (912) 825-6354
Route 3, Box 75
Fort Valley, GA 31030

Bowens Mill Fish Hatchery (912) 423-7211
Route 1, Box 1820
Fitzgerald, GA 31750

Manchester Office (404) 846-8448
601 Third Avenue
Manchester, GA 31816

Demeries Creek Office (912) 651-2222
Route 2, Box 219-R
Richmond Hill, GA 31324

Attention: Toxicant Precautions

- Observe all directions, restrictions and precautions on toxicant labels. It is dangerous, wasteful and illegal to do otherwise.
- Store all toxicants behind locked doors, in original containers with labels intact. **KEEP TOXICANTS OUT OF THE REACH OF CHILDREN**
- Use toxicants at correct label dosage and intervals to avoid illegal residues or unintended injury to plants and animals.
- Apply toxicants carefully to avoid drift or contamination of non-target areas.
- Surplus toxicants and containers should be disposed of in accordance with label instructions, so that unintended contamination of water and other hazards will not result.

Follow directions on the toxicant label regarding restrictions as required by State and Federal laws and regulations.