

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Mission

Statement: Managing Oklahoma's wildlife resources and habitat to provide scientific, educational, aesthetic, economic and recreational benefits for present and future generations of hunters, anglers and others who appreciate wildlife.

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Back to the Basics Pond Management Simplicity

By John Stahl, northwest regional Fisheries supervisor

Summer is here and everyone has the urge to go fishing. Many will head down to the pond on the back 40. But, they may get tired of just catching the normal farm pond fish species. So why not add a little excitement to the mix. Here are just a few of the questions the Department commonly receives about farm ponds.

Will rainbow trout live year round in my pond?

When the pond was constructed we uncovered six strong springs and when we go swimming, the depths are real cold.

Answer:

The presence of springs and cold ground water does not mean that trout will survive. One key consideration besides cold temperatures is the amount of oxygen in the water. Trout need oxygen levels of 6-7 parts per million to be healthy. Most warm water fish like largemouth bass need around 3-5 parts per million.

There are three factors limiting the amount of oxygen in pond water. First ground water has little or no oxygen as it surfaces. If your spring enters below the ponds surface it may be very cold, but very oxygen poor. Farm ponds may also be rich in organic matter such as dead leaves, cattails or cowpies. Bacteria are also present and will break this organic matter down consuming up to 99 percent of the pond's oxygen in the process. This leaves little oxygen for trout. Just like many of the Department's winter time trout fisheries; you can stock rainbows in late October and have good trout fishing in your pond through March or April. Remember to stock at least 8.5 inch trout or larger to avoid largemouth predation.

What about stocking hybrid stripers, walleye, saugeye or flathead catfish in my pond?

Answer:

Folks, it's hard to beat a pond with largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish. The easiest farm pond to manage (keep in balance and producing) is one containing a single species, like a fed channel catfish pond. You will have more problems with every species you add.

These large exotic predators don't work well because of food economics. An old largemouth bass has an established territory and ambushes it's prey like a big cat. It uses very little energy to obtain fuel. Because the bass is efficient, it only needs around six pounds of bluegill to produce one pound of bass. Stripers, hybrid stripers, walleye and saugeye are roving wolf packs, which are always on the move. Because of their hunting strategy, they burn energy. Therefore it would take over ten pounds of groceries to produce one pound of predator.

As you can see, a good population of these predators would quickly eat all the forage in the pond causing the largemouth bass population to be in poor shape. Flathead catfish are huge predators that can reach up to one hundred pounds. A big engine needs a lot of fuel. Stock one to two 10 to 20 pound flathead catfish in your pond and in a few years, all you will have are two 30 to 50 pound flatheads. They are underwater vacuums that will clean out a pond.



It's hard to beat pond channel catfishing action.

