

Ponds are Full Again

We have finally had enough rain in most areas of the county to re-fill our drought stressed ponds. While it may look like everything is back to normal, there may be some lingering effects from the drought. Two of the biggest problems we may see this spring are excessive growths of filamentous algae and badly out of balance fish populations.

While the water was down in many ponds the exposed mud flats of the pond bottom provided a great place for terrestrial weeds and trees to begin growing. The nutrient rich mud and moisture allows for rapid weed growth. As I told one friend, "You know you are in a drought when you find yourself mowing the bottom of your pond" as I did this past fall. Now that the water is back up most of these terrestrial type weeds will quickly die and decay. This can lead to explosive growths of filamentous algae. Strangely, one of the best remedies for this is to fertilize your pond starting now. The fertilizer will promote planktonic algae (suspended algae about the size of salt) that gives the water a green color. This "good" algae serves as the base of the food chain in a pond but also creates shade on the pond bottom which kills the weeds growing there, including filamentous algae. So you may see some "gunk" float to surface but it should disappear on it's on. Willows and alders can persist much longer. If this woody material is a problem, it can be controlled with an aquatic herbicide such as Rodeo (glyphosate). A word of caution – don't use copper sulfate to control your algae unless you know you have high alkalinity.

For many ponds the low water level creates an out-of-balance pond. As the fish become more crowded, the prey fish (bream) become for accessible to the bass. As the bream are depleted (remember no reproduction during the winter) the pond becomes bass crowded. So if you ever had the urge to invite your friends over to go bass fishing, now would be a good time. A good harvest of bass early in the season will give the bream a better chance to spawn and catch up. In severe cases, it may even call for restocking to get the pond back in order. We normally shoot for a 10:1 ratio of bream to bass population. In fact, a fertilized pond is usually stocked with 1000 bream per acre and 100 bass per acre. If you are concerned about the pond balance or fish population you can request assistance with a balance check through the Fisheries Division of the State Department of Conservation by calling (334) 358-0035. Many times they can help you over the phone but they also do pond balance checks in June and September each year for specific situations. Please feel free to call me if you have questions 256-377-4713 and happy fishing!