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December 06, 2007

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The New Year will be here before you know it, and it will be time for those annual resolutions. Pond owners, this is easy, resolve to fish more. This can be an important aspect of a pond management plan that is sometimes over looked. As a pond owner you have invested time and money in your pond to improve the angling experience. You sweated through the summer oxygen problems, battled weeds, and never missed a feeding or fertilization.

You have spent a lot of time on your pond, but not harvesting fish. Sure you go fishing on weekends with your friends and family, but when you catch a smaller bass you throw it back to 'let it grow up'. Unfortunately, not all bass and bream can grow up to be trophies for your office wall. For a bass/bream pond to remain healthy, and in balance, some fish must be harvested each year. When you stocked your pond, you likely stocked fish in ratios to achieve a balance. However, now that your pond has been established for some time, you need to harvest fish to maintain that balance. When fish populations are not maintained, they can become too large resulting in a crowding scenario.

'Bass crowded' is a condition that is common in ponds where bass are not harvested in sufficient numbers. The result is mostly stunted bass that seem to stop growing beyond 12 inches. This happens because there are so many bass that the bream cannot produce

enough forage to feed them, so they stunt. In a bass crowded pond, you may also see very few, but very large bream, and almost no small bream. To repair a bass crowded pond, small bass should be harvested.

The goal, however, is to avoid the problem if at all possible. To do this, develop and stick to a harvesting plan for your pond. In most ponds, where the owner wishes to catch both bass and bream, the typical harvest rate will depend on fertilization. In both cases, a pond should not be harvested in the first year after stocking bass. After a year, if a pond is fertilized regularly, twenty-five pounds of bass and as much as two-hundred pounds of bream should be harvested per acre, per year. In unfertilized ponds, these recommendations are ten pounds of bass and up to 100 pounds of bream per acre per year.

For additional questions or information, contact P.J. Waters, Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center, 438-5690.