

FishBusters  
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## **The Florida Bass Conservation Center**

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On February 23, 2007, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) will dedicate the new Florida Bass Conservation Center (FBCC). Its overall mission is "To conduct and utilize essential research to optimize production, stocking and recruitment of Florida largemouth bass to facilitate integrated conservation management of Florida's freshwater fisheries resources."



In 2002, it was recognized that the FWC's antiquated fish hatchery at Richloam in Sumter County had to be replaced if Florida hoped to retain its' "Fishing Capital of the World" title, at least with regard to largemouth bass. In business since April 1965, Richloam was one of the oldest fish hatcheries in the country. Although it did much more with much less than many of the nation's 21st century facilities, it was a major drain on the aquifer, used minimal recycling and was plagued by various fish predators that depleted production.

To solve this dilemma, Ed Moyer proposed a state-of-the-art facility to be dedicated to propagation and conservation of Florida's famous largemouth bass. Florida bass are actually a distinct subspecies of largemouth black bass characterized by faster growth and being a more challenging piscatorial opponent than their northern cousin. In addition, Florida is home to the Suwannee and shoal basses, which are unique southern adaptations of the black bass, that are very limited in range and need careful management to ensure their healthy futures.



Moyer, who at the time was Director of the Division of Freshwater Fisheries, envisioned a new climate-controlled rearing facility to give biologists an opportunity to spawn bass and other freshwater species at the most opportune time to provide effective stocking throughout the state of appropriately-sized fish. Without this ability, many stocking efforts prove fruitless, because young fish have to be stocked at times of

year when the forage (prey) base may not be adequate for the young bass' survival and growth.

New sheltered raceways contribute to rearing significantly more fish per unit area in a more cost effective manner than the old hatchery's dirt pond method. This technique also helps to conserve water, to minimize predation from birds, assure good water quality, and maximize feed conversion--saving money and protecting the environment. New food technology being developed at FBCC along automatic feeders and state-of-the art filtration systems will help maximize growth rates and minimize mortality. This will allow us to more than triple recent production.

The FBCC will also conduct a genetics program to ensure future stocking programs are of optimum benefit to native populations. This is critical to maintaining integrity of native Florida bass, Suwannee bass and Shoal bass. A dedicated lab and biologist specializing in warmwater fish health will further ensure the FBCC meets its goal "To produce healthy, genetically fit Florida largemouth bass and other freshwater fishes at the appropriate time, in sizes and numbers to effectively and efficiently support freshwater fisheries conservation projects."

In the near future, the plan calls for a comprehensive library and publicly accessible internet-based data center, as well as facilities to host scientists from universities, various government agencies and the private sector to conduct state-of-the-art research. In addition to scientific information, this data base will include angler use, angler success and bass growth rate data for various lakes, so that resident anglers, tourists and tournaments can all more effectively plan their fishing trips.

Ultimately, Darrell Scovell, the current Director of the Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management, anticipates developing a public education complex and visitors' center and the FBCC to provide citizens with the latest information about Florida fisheries biology, freshwater fishing techniques and aquatic habitats. Not only will there be educational displays, trails and observation facilities, but also fishing ponds and instructions will ultimately be provided. The site is on Division of Forestry property. They will be invited to share in outreach efforts pertaining to silviculture and land management, as will the Division of State Parks, since the facility is at the nexus of several state and federal recreational trails, including the FWC's own Great Florida Birding Trail. The tourism and outreach potential will greatly enhance abilities to explain our conservation stewardship message and the role of recreational fishing and other outdoor activities to the public.



The Sunshine State is recognized as the "Fishing Capital of the World" based on a number of factors. Among the most important is information provided by the 2001

National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation that shows Florida is the number one recreational fishing state in terms of number of anglers, number of angling days, direct economic impact, jobs supported and many other important factors. For instance, Florida attracts 3.1 million anglers, who fish 48.4 million days, spend \$4.1 billion, and support 80,000 jobs. The next highest state is California which respectively generates the following numbers: 2.4 million anglers, 27.7 million days, \$2.4 billion and 43,000 jobs. Nationally, and in Florida's fresh waters black bass are the most popular fish sought after by anglers. In Florida, bass anglers spent 12.2 million days pursuing their sport in 2001.

The FBCC was paid for in part by federal Wallop-Breaux and State Wildlife Grants together with state matching funds, and a Rural Economic Development Initiative grant. FISHPRO was contracted to develop architectural and engineering plans for the FBCC and the local Vogel Brothers construction company built the facility. Primarily private funding will be utilized for the visitors' center and the Wildlife Foundation of Florida (WFF) will help by collecting donations.



One great way to donate to the FBCC is by purchasing Glen Lau décor prints, videos or DVDs. Mr. Lau is the preeminent bass photographer and cinematographer in the world. He has graciously offered the use of his art at the FBCC and now is allowing the WFF to sell his creations, including the awesome “Bigmouth” and “Bigmouth Forever” videos, with all the profits going to the FBCC. See

[www.WildlifeFoundationofFlorida.com](http://www.WildlifeFoundationofFlorida.com) to order copies.

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