Area Crawfish Industry Little Harmed By Cold

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Even though commercial crawfish producers began pulling their harvest from the south Louisiana mud as early as November, the recent blast of icy Arctic air had little effect on the industry, one expert says.

And while for the pond fishermen, it was bad for the swamp fishermen, says another expert.

Crawfish producers are basically divided into two groups. There are those who have ponds, and those who rely on the unpredictable water level of the great Atchafalaya Basin to encourage the crusty little crustaceans to leave their mud burrows, feed, and multiply.

Don Gooch, a marine biologist with the University of Southwest Louisiana, says the severe cold weather "had no effect whatsoever" on commercial ponds in the area. In fact, he says, water temperature in the ponds is now warmer than it was before the week of freezing weather set in.

The only impact the weather may have caused, he concludes, is several lost days of harvest to the fishermen.

Snow And Rain Vital

It is the swamp fishermen that were indirectly affected by the winter storm, explains George Cry, chief hydrologist with the Slidell River Center of the National Weather Service.

Cry says relatively little precipitation — rain, or most probably, snow and ice — was associated with the chilling storm. Until last week, he adds, most of the northern part of the nation was well below average precipitation levels.

And this precipitation is vital to the life flow of the Atchafalaya River Basin.

Cry explains the type of weather that occurs in the north during the next month or so will tell whether the nation's drainage system will send enough water into the Atchafalaya River to bring the Basin into life.

In short, the Basin crawfish season will be upon swamp fishermen at about the same time that experts can predict Basin water levels.

Cry also says the type of weather that occurs in the north when ice and snow begin to melt will be just as important as the amount of precipitation that has fallen over the winter months.

High River Stages

He says moderate temperatures with no rain results in a slow, gentle melt, as opposed to unseasonable warm temperatures accompanied by heavy rain that produce quick runoff and high river stages.

Because of the division of waters between the Atchafalaya and the Mississippi Rivers...