LWF board oks lake fish study

By PAUL KEDINGER
Editor

LAFAYETTE - Members of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission agreed with experts in the department's inland fish division and approved a notice of intent to conduct a three-year research project on Florida black bass now being stocked in the newly refilled Chicot Lake, located north of Ville Platte.

The commission's affirmative vote Friday morning followed a presentation by Benny Fontenot, chief of the inland fish division, and Gary Tilyou, fish biologist, before the board Thursday afternoon.

The data they presented to LWF commissioners was almost word-for-word the same as presented during a public hearing held Dec. 10, 1987, at Chicot State Park.

At that hearing, overwhelming support for the first research project of its kind in Louisiana was expressed by area and state bass club representatives.

Ville Platte Mayor Hottell Fontenot, Evangeline Parish Registrar of Voters Herbert Fontenot, Jr. and Jacques Coreil, chairman of the Ville Platte Rotary Club Chicot State Park Committee, attended Thursday's hearing to lend their support to the project, which is expected to produce trophy-size bass in the lake and attract more tourist business to Evangeline Parish.

The bass research study must now receive the support of the Legislative Oversight Committee, chaired by Sen. Hank Lauricella and Rep. Clyde Kimball. The legislators have 60 days within which to act on the notice of intent, before returning the request to the LWF Commission for final adoption.

The research project will follow the development of the black bass population in Chicot Lake and include measurement of recruitment, growth, mortality, food habits, fishermen creel, genetic makeup and habitat quality.
During the study, a 14-minimum size and a 10-fish daily creel limit for black bass will be imposed on Chicot Lake. Present regulations for black bass establish a 15-fish per day creel limit with no minimum size.

Benny Fontenot told commissioners Thursday afternoon that the research study, with its fishing restrictions, was being undertaken, in part, because state bass fishermen are putting increasing pressure on the department to manage the bass population and produce trophy size fish as fished in neighboring states.

Fontenot indicated he hopes to start the study on June 1 and continue the intensive examination through Dec. 31, 1989. The research will be reviewed annually at which time fisheries' experts will recommend continuation or modification of the basis. That data will be shared with fishermen at annual public hearings.

The LWF economic impact statement reports the department will spend almost $280,000 during the three-year study. Seventy-five percent of the study's funding will be federal Dingell-Johnson (Wallop-Breaux) funds. Three new field biologists will be hired to conduct fisheries' research at Chicot Lake.

Chicot Lake is considered an ideal research environment to examine intensive black bass management techniques, because it was drained and refilled during recent rains.

The impact statement submitted to the commission reveals, "The proposed rule could result in a 10 percent to 20 percent increase in fishermen visits to Chicot Lake. This would result in an additional expenditure by fishermen of $174,800 to $349,600 annually with a corresponding increase in state and local tax revenues."