Spillway Opening Doesn't Affect Crawfish Industry

Local Merchant Gives His Views

Opening the Bonnet Carre Spillway will have no effect on the commercial crawfish industry, according to a local retail crawfish merchant.

Al Scramuzza explained that the Belle River variety of crawfish come from the Morganza Spillway area. Although this one has not been opened, he continued, there is high water in that spillway because of overflow from the Atchafalaya Basin. "If this water subsides in May, we will have more crawfish than we have had in many years," Scramuzza said. "In addition they will be a finer grade of crawfish because lots of water and current make crawfish grow rapidly. More oxygen in the water aids the crawfish's growth. Fresh water also helps him shed his shell, and each time a crawfish sheds a shell, it grows one-third more of its size."

Although the Bonnet Carre Spillway opening does not affect commercial crawfishing, it will have an effect on sports crawfishing by individuals.

According to Cecil LaCaze, former crawfish biologist for the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries and now supervisor of its District Six in Opelousas, opening the Bonnet Carre Floodway, by enriching the area with river silt, will make the area more fertile and productive for the next four or five years.

LaCaze talked about how annual flooding and drying out is what makes good crawfish. "When the water is back down in the low places, crawfishing should be better than it has been in the last few years. But there will be no gigantic increase or "goldmine of crawfish this year." However, by enriching the area, crawfishing should be materially better for a few years, he said.

Nevertheless, LaCaze cautioned that weather was an important factor, and that crawfish growth depended on the temperature of the water. They grow best in water above 65 degrees, he said.

Scramuzza also talked about how, when the water subsides, the crawfish seek the gulleyes and crevices and become concentrated in the low places. This makes it easier for fishermen to catch them, he explained, adding that if the water recedes, the crawfishing will be excellent.

He also predicted that prices of crawfish will stay more or less at the present levels until Easter or Easter Week. This usually occurs every year, he continued, because New Orleans is a heavily Catholic town and many people eat fish during Lent. When Lent is over the demand drops and with it the price, he said.