

WILDLIFE

Full ponds enable fish restocking

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Rainfall in the

first half of 2013 has filled many ponds in the Southern Great Plains that were partially or completely dried up due to drought. With full

ponds again, many pond managers are wondering whether the fish in the ponds survived or if they will need to be restocked. Restocking fish can be expensive and time consuming, so make sure fish are needed before any are stocked.

If a pond retained a reasonable amount of water during the drought, there is a chance the fish survived. Before any fish are restocked, the absence or presence and abundance of fish should first be determined. This can be done by conducting a hook and line survey, seine survey and/or by using funnel traps. For more information about these methods, see the *Ag News and Views* articles *Hook and Line Fish Sampling* (www.noble.org/ag/wildlife/hookandline-fishsampling), *Seine Sampling a Pond* (www.noble.org/ag/wildlife/seinesamplingpond) and *Funnel Trap Fish Survey* (www.noble.org/ag/wildlife/funnel-trap).

A hook and line survey is structured fishing where records such



as time spent fishing, fish species caught, and weight and length of every fish caught are recorded. Necessary equipment includes rods, reels, and a variety of different sized artificial lures and/or live bait.

A seine survey is primarily used to monitor the reproductive success of largemouth bass, bluegill and some other members of the sunfish family by capturing small fish that are young-of-the-year (less than 1 year old) or possibly from the previous year. This survey method is best conducted between mid-June and mid-September when most young fish are present. For most farm pond surveys,

a 20-foot by 4-foot seine with a 1/8-inch mesh is sufficient.

A funnel trap fish survey is used to provide information on the presence of species such as bullheads, bluegill, redear sunfish, green sunfish, etc. Funnel traps are usually constructed from hardware cloth formed into a cylinder. Typically, each end has an inward pointing funnel with a 2-inch opening serving as the entrance of the trap for the fish. Traps are typically placed in 3 to 5 feet of water. Traps should be checked daily. Check your local wildlife and fisheries regulations for specific rules on the use of funnel traps in your area. ►

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After conducting the surveys and finding fish, determine the proportional stock density (PSD). The PSD can provide insight on the proportion of quality-size bass (12 inches) or bluegill (6 inches) to stock-size bass (8 inches) or bluegill (3 inches). With this information, a pond manager can make educated harvest and stocking decisions. For help determining this information, contact a local fisheries biologist. For more information about PSD, see the *Ag News and Views* article *Monitoring Bass and Bluegill Popula-*

tions in Ponds (www.noble.org/ag/wildlife/pondpopulations).

If a quality largemouth bass and bluegill fishery is your goal and you've determined no fish are present in a pond larger than 0.5 acre, stock 500 bluegill fingerlings (1- to 3-inch long fish) in September or October per acre. For added variety, 250 redear sunfish can be substituted for 250 bluegill. One hundred channel catfish fingerlings per acre can be stocked at this time if desired. The following May or early June,

stock 100 largemouth fingerlings per acre. For a pond smaller than 0.5 acre (with the goal of catching channel catfish and largemouth bass), stock 10 channel catfish fingerlings per 0.1 acre of area during September or October and then stock four largemouth bass fingerlings per 0.1 acre during the following May or early June. For more information about stocking fish, see the *Ag News and Views* article *Proper Stocking Is a Key to Quality Fishing* (www.noble.org/ag/wildlife/properstocking). ■