

Inglis fisherman says herbicides killing bass fishing on Lake Rousseau

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Longtime Lake Rousseau bass fisherman Harold Beasley says the over-spraying of herbicides by the state has killed fish habitat and robbed the lake of its abundant bass population.

“The fishing is down so bad; only a few people can flip the pads and get 20 to 30 pounds of bass,” he said. “When they spray an area, the fish leave. The rule of thumb is the fish like clean water.”

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission says herbicide spraying is the most cost-effective, efficient and “environmentally sound method for control of rapidly growing floating plants and Hydrilla” on the lake.

FWC operates the state funded herbicide spraying program on Lake Rousseau.

Beasley, owner of Beasley Tire Co. in Inglis, disagrees with the amount and frequency of spraying on Lake Rousseau.

He said he doesn't fish the Lower Withlacoochee River anymore, but he knows something is wrong with the river. The Lower Withlacoochee receives all its water from a bypass dam on Lake Rousseau.

Beasley said the eel grass has all but disappeared. In 1979 he said he could see eel grass flowing with the river current all along the river.

He said the big oyster bed at the mouth of the river is also gone.

“It's not saltwater intrusion. It's the stuff coming out of the river,” he said.

He added, “When they started the spraying, the eel grass died.”

Beasley says the state is spraying too much herbicide and too often in Lake Rousseau. He believes the state biologists spray all the chemicals they have on hand every year for fear they might be given a smaller allotment of chemicals the following year.

“It's over-kill,” he said.

He believes a drawdown every two or three years would kill the aquatic weeds that the state says block boat channels, without driving away the fish.

Back in the day, before the days of heavy spraying, Beasley said some of the guys from the power company would get off work and come to Lake Rousseau. It was common for those fishermen to see schools of 50 bass swimming in the lake.

“They were good size bass. Those days are gone,” he said.

Beasley said there is a lot of bass spawning in the area known as the graveyard because there are too many stumps for the state to spray the area. He said the small areas the state leaves alone are the main spawning areas now.

He doesn't believe the bass population will ever recover in the lake as long as the spraying continues at current levels.

“I catch bass on Lake Rousseau, but you have to look and look and look,” he said.