

Wes Porak-Rich Cailteux Award 2013

Wes Porak has dedicated his 30 year career with FWC researching black bass to ensure their current and future conservation. He has gained local and national recognition for his accomplishments, which include service on many scientific technical advisory committees on black bass management, nearly 20 peer reviewed scientific publications, numerous articles and white papers, and an active role in all levels of the American Fisheries Society (AFS).

Wes led a team of state biologists working on the conservation and management of largemouth bass during the 1980's and 1990's. He was instrumental in the evaluation of otoliths for aging in Florida, evaluating alternate harvest regulations such as catch-and-release and protective slot limits, evaluating food habits of trophy largemouth bass, and evaluating the effects of hydrilla management on bass populations. Wes also led a large effort to evaluate the efficiency of stocking hatchery produced largemouth bass in the wild. His research led to a better understanding of the success of stocking and factors influencing survival of pellet reared hatchery fish. The results of his research provided the basis for changes in hatchery rearing practices that resulted in a new feed formulation specifically developed for largemouth bass to increase survival. Additionally, Wes identified key behavioral challenges that hatchery fish had to adapt to in order to increase their survival in the wild.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the conservation of black bass in Florida was the genetics program Wes developed to ensure the long-term well being of our unique Florida strain of largemouth bass. Wes has worked with other scientists from many agencies to develop the FWC's Genetic Policy for the Release of Finfishes in Florida (2007). He was also instrumental in the creation of new importation laws to prevent movement of fish into and out of the state to ensure we do not lose this unique genetic strain of largemouth bass.

Wes was one of the most influential biologists in the creation of the long-term black bass management plan (BBMP). The BBMP will help guide FWC's Division of Freshwater Fisheries and FWRI Freshwater Research with future management and research of black bass in the state. Wes recently chaired a national black bass symposium titled "Black Bass Diversity-Multidisciplinary Science for Conservation" that was held at the annual meeting of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society. This symposium emphasized the conservation need and diversity of black basses in their native habitats.

Wes not only is a talented researcher and leader but is also a great mentor. He truly enjoys working with young biologists and making sure that they start their career off right and keep going in the right direction. He goes out of his way to help anyone with questions they may have and makes sure that everyone is doing research that makes a difference. He encourages all young biologists to participate in the American Fisheries Society, present their research, and publish as often as possible. Wes has always maintained a high level of visibility within AFS, and was the FL chapter president in 1988. His leadership skills earned him the title of "Fish and Wildlife Biologist of the Year" by the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and the Award of Excellence from the American Fisheries Society Fish Management Section.

Wes, on behalf of the FL Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, it's my honor and privilege to present you with the 2013 Rich Cailteux Award.