

SDAFS Small Impoundments Open Forum
Chattanooga, TN
February 1, 2024

Meeting Minutes

Call to Order

The annual meeting of the Small Impoundments Committee (SIC) was called to order at 1:05 pm EST on 2/1/24 by Chair Cynthia Fox Holt. The Tennessee Chapter of AFS hosted the conference. This technical meeting had a Microsoft Teams virtual option for those who couldn't attend in person. Many members were in attendance with others participating in the virtual option as denoted below. Cynthia welcomed those in attendance.

Introduction of committee members and guests

A role call was taken with all members and guests asked to introduce themselves. It was determined there was a quorum of at least 10 members present.

Committee members/proxies in attendance were:

Graves Lovell – Alabama DCNR
Scott Jones – Arkansas UAPB – Virtual
Hayden Wennerdahl – Florida FWC – Virtual
Tim Bonvechio – Georgia GDNR - Virtual
Dane Balsman – Kentucky KDFWR – Secretary/Treasurer
Ryan Daniel – Louisiana LDWF
David Belkoski – North Carolina NCWRC - Virtual
Keith Thomas – Oklahoma ODWC - Virtual
Aaron Cushing – Solitude Lake Management
Preston Chrisman – South Carolina SCDNR
AJ Simmons – SE Pond Management - Virtual
Mike Bramlett – Tennessee TWRA - Virtual
Cynthia Fox Holt – Texas TPWD – Chair
Steven Bardin – Texas Pro Lake - Virtual
Steve Owens – Virginia VDGIF

Guests in attendance were:

Matt Schroeder – Arkansas AGFC
Gene Gilliland – B.A.S.S.
Marcy Anderson – Kentucky KDFWR
Jason Russell – Kentucky KDFWR
Dalton Norris – Oklahoma ODWC
Jon West – Oklahoma ODWC
Michael Williams – Oklahoma ODWC
Christopher Horvath – Solitude Lake Management
Alex Johnson – Solitude Lake Management
Connor Ballard – Tennessee TWRA
Hunter Brown – Tennessee TWRA
Jeremy Gooch – Tennessee TWRA

Jason Henegar – Tennessee TWRA
Jonathon Pritchard – Tennessee TWRA
Justin Heflin – Virginia VDGIF

Anthony Overton, SDAFS president-elect sat in on the meeting as well.

Approval of minutes

A motion to approve the minutes from the 2023 SDAFS SIC meeting was presented and passed with no objections.

Treasurers report

The financial report was presented to the SIC by Dane Balsman. The only committee income during the past year was the aquatic plant id and control workshop which amounted to \$1,616.38 in income. Expenses for the workshop totaled \$126.33. Book royalties for the small impoundments book have dried up and we no longer receive a royalty check.

- \$1,813.27 as of 2/2/23 SDAFS meeting (Truist Bank)
- + \$1,616.38 plant id and control workshop 2/3/23
- -\$126.33 expenses for workshop
- \$3,303.32 as of 2/1/24 SDAFS meeting (Truist Bank)

Member Updates

Cynthia asked each state to give a quick update of highlights on small impoundment management in their respective states. She said Texas had recently changed regulations at their community fishing ponds after a survey to a 5 fish aggregate with 1 bass over 14 inches. 97% of anglers interviewed were in favor of the new reg. Texas has worked on doing some habitat improvement projects in ponds including rock piles and native plant establishment and control. Some IF districts in Texas have stopped using plastic structures.

Dane gave a brief update on the channel catfish spawning boxes installed at state owned lakes under 500 acres. District staff were seeing spawning and reproduction, but not much in way of recruitment likely due to predation. Kentucky's urban program the Fishing in Neighborhoods (FINs) program has not changed much recently with 45 lakes and 120,000 catfish and 120,000 trout stocked annually.

Steve said Virginia was looking at fertilization rates in small impoundments to ensure fertilization was not flowing out of the system. They partnered with a chemist from James Madison University and found that lakes being fertilized for fish production were acting as a sink and excess nutrients were not flowing out of the system. They are looking to publish findings soon. VA has 32 department owned lakes that district staff spend a lot of time doing management on because these lakes have high fishing pressure. VA also has community fishing ponds where they look to maintain catch rates of at least 1 fish/hr. VA purchases all the catfish for the program, roughly \$150,000 annually and are maxed out on trout production. A trout permit is required fishing these community lakes stocked with trout during the trout season, but no special permits are required for catfish at these community fishing sites. VA also trying to do bathymetric mapping for state owned and popular municipal lakes but have run into issues with IT group with state government. VA also has an active habitat program. Steve Bardin said BioBase software is useful for building maps and state agencies should have free subscription. Bardin was going to send contact info for BioBase to the group. Steve said the issue was sharing maps with public, not so much collection of data. Keith Thomas said OK was trying to something similar with building maps. The

committee may want to look into a workshop or presentation on how to build and share bathymetry maps for state agencies?

Aaron with Solitude said they are trying to do all female bass stockings, different strains of bass from F1 to pure Florida bass for trophy bass management. They are also working on oxygen technologies to oxygenate small ponds without turnover effect, to have a two-story fishery. Bottom cool water is oxygenated without turnover to create cold water fisheries in warmer climates. Just installed that first system but may be able to present in the future.

David with NC said they have pretty big community fishing program that is stocked with catfish, and they are looking at exploitation rates. Exploitation of catfish was lower than expected in some areas with many catfish holding over. These community ponds also stocked with trout of all sizes. Big hit especially in eastern part of state, where anglers must drive 8 hours to see trout. Most of the trout get caught quickly. City municipalities ask them to stock fish and they do community assessments to determine if necessary.

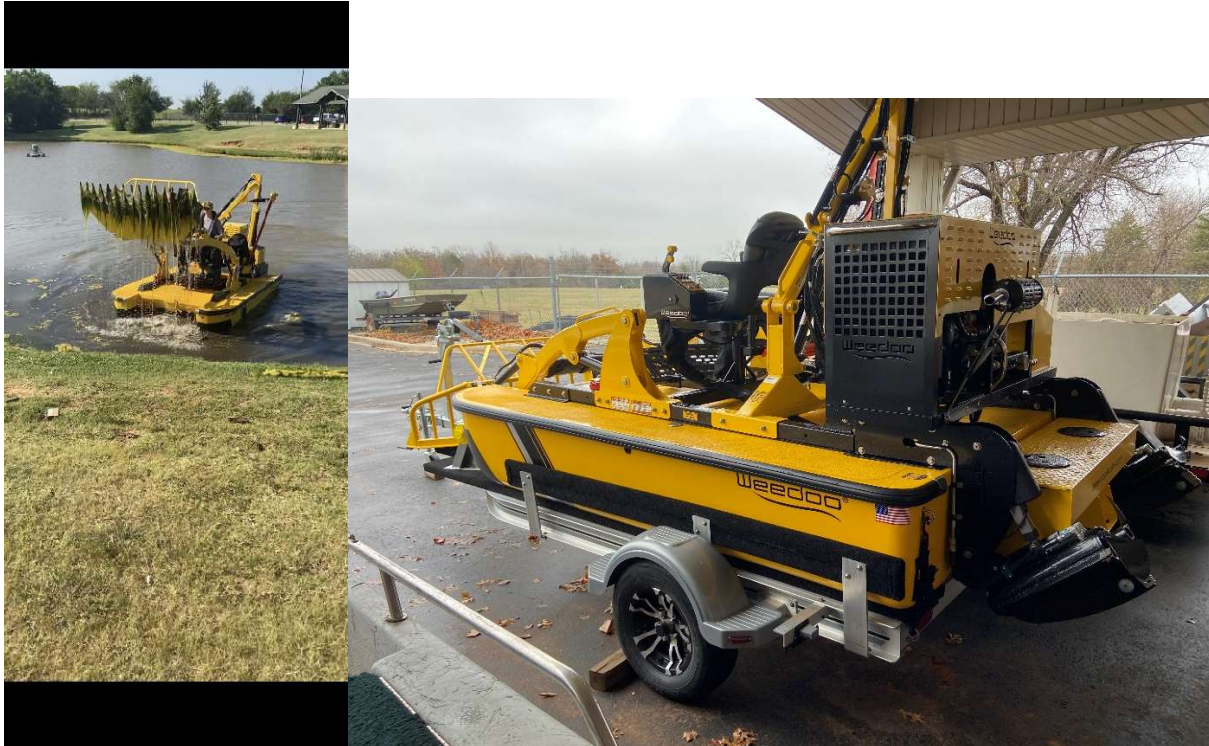
Graves with AL said small impoundment management has changed a lot in the last 5-6 years. The program was huge 30 years ago, where we bought a lot of property and built impoundments. The original design worked well when people harvested fish, now very little harvest. These lakes used to get a lot of attention, pressure, and harvest, but the original design isn't working anymore. Lake managers or concessionaires are contracted to keep gates open and manage the lake. They do everything from selling tackle, opening and closing gates, mowing, trash pick-up, fertilization and recording all fish caught which is great data. But they make money selling concessions and state doesn't give them any benefits, other than some permit sale money. Some lake managers were getting creative to make money, and it wasn't a fit for agency mission, so transitioning away from that model. Some lakes are now open to public at all times which has created issues. Staff shortages, not enough people to maintain these lakes. When renovating lakes, stocking rates are being done differently based on littoral acres instead of total surface acres. Also reevaluating fertilization program due to cost.

Connor with TN in region 3 works primarily in his district on state park lakes, municipality owned and a few in National Forest. TN has implemented Bill Dance signature lake series to direct extra efforts towards. Have increased habitat efforts, stocking forage, year long creel, Effort to get more people fishing and create trophy fisheries. Feeders seem to be improving relative weights, but jury is still out if increasing biomass. Graves chimed in that Auburn did a study 15 years ago and found it takes 2 pounds per acre per day to affect the entire population. A lot of that has to do with quality of feed. There are some new low phosphorous options out there as well. Looking to liberalize bag limits where people don't harvest as many fish as in the past. Having bass crowded lakes not always bad, as hungry bass tend to bite more for new anglers, so kids don't get bored. With bass removals have to continue to remove or reverts back. Preston was going to send out presentation from last year on bass removal work in small impoundments, for those in attendance who hadn't seen. Some states starting to get push back on using plastic fish structures. Reservoir committee is looking at study to evaluate micro-plastics.

Keith with OK gave an update on weed harvest boat the Weedoo. Have used the boat in urban ponds and department owned lakes to open fishing lanes especially before events. Cutting head only goes 3 ft down, so sometimes only cutting tops off then skimming the pond. Looking to possibly buy another one for the agency. Keith shared some images and video links (below).

<https://youtu.be/vaztzRA0dtU>

https://youtu.be/CfSYlvr_zRg?si=5iEDCaK6uURjRbjm



Preston with SC said they have state owned or leased 21 lakes ranging from .5 to 400 acres with varying levels of management. Some fertilized some not, maybe 3 are considered trophy bass lakes, one or two balanced and rest bass crowded. Did bass removals at a couple of lakes and monitored. One appeared to hold its own and moved towards more balanced and the other one didn't show positive improvement.

Tim with GA talked about their 11 public fishing areas and bass management. They are conducting bass removals at some lakes with high recruitment to keep relative weights up. Several lakes managed for trophy bass with high Florida alleles, while others managed for balanced fisheries. Five of the 11 areas have multiple lakes. Several of the lakes have been renovated and stocked with low numbers of all female bass (15-23 bass/acre) with abundant forage to create trophy bass fishery. Bass reached 10-12 inches at the hatchery being stocked at 120 fish/acre in hatchery ponds and stocked with bluegill and threadfin shad for forage. Bass were sexed prior to being stocked with female bass pit tagged prior to release. Female only recipe keeps bass densities down since no one harvests bass. Fishing pressure seems to be biggest limiting factor as fish are hook shy and heavily pressured. Summer hooking mortality can be high with anglers keeping fish out of water too long. Limiting pressure and time of year is key to growing big fish. Anglers have experienced low catch rates as expected, with about 1 bass caught per 10 hours, but average bass size was over 5 pounds. Some of these low-density bass stockings have created trophy white crappie fisheries as well.

Daniel with LA said they don't currently do a lot of small impoundments work but do have outreach section that stocks community ponds with rainbow trout and catfish. Most of these lakes are less than 3 acres and have unrestricted access. Trout offer unique opportunity for anglers in January and February, but ponds warm up quickly. Big lakes are prioritized, with smaller lakes often neglected and not as intensive management.

Scott with AR said there are several intermediate sized reservoirs undergoing renovation in the state. A lot of unique opportunities around the state to see how lakes rebound after renovations.

AJ has several ponds managed in GA and AL that have been renovated and stocked, but conditions have to be perfect to grow trophy fishery and window is short. Seeing similar results to Tim with fish topping out at 15 pounds then seeing 10-12 pounds as fish get older and new lake effect wears off. Wondering if it's genetics forage availability in all sizes or age of fish. Found that with chubsuckers aka trout of the south that as bass densities increased this forage disappeared. They also need weedy lakes to do well.

Old Business

Workshop Effectiveness Quiz and Feedback

Matt Sell with Maryland was going to take the lead on survey results and effectiveness to see what we could improve on next time we did the workshop and possibility of publishing results. Cynthia was going to follow up with Matt on status. Had people tell us workshop was very beneficial.

SIC Facebook page

Reminder to submit any work conducted on small impoundments that you may be overlooking that may be interesting to post on the SIC Facebook page. Job postings, work you're doing etc.

Website updates

Dane keeps website updated and archives old meeting minutes and state reports. If you have anything you would like to see changed or updated please let Dane know.

Committee member list

Work with SDAFS president on SIC member list to determine state reps and voting members. See if president has sent out call to fish chiefs for new appointments to make sure current member list is accurate to determine voting members.

Student and young professional engagement and recruitment

Cynthia said this was something brought up last year, that when you are working with students interested in small impoundments and fisheries to bring them in and give them experience with this group. If they can give presentation on their work to SIC even better, as experience going to professional conferences and networking is invaluable. We can't afford scholarship for SIC currently but encourage professionals to have Hutton student or mentor someone. The SIC should try to have workshops every few years to train young professionals and students on small impoundment management. Just general small impoundment management, some type of hands-on experience with field trip. University level not teaching management as much especially small impoundment basics. Work with schools to get students interested in fisheries and fishing. Check with local groups FFA, 4H, extension offices, B.A.S.S. conservation groups for habitat projects. Steven Bardin brought up new Johnny Morris Institute for creating fisheries biologists starting up in Missouri and sent out contact info for the group. Information and contacts from Steven listed below.

Johnny Morris Institute - <https://fwas.missouri.edu/>

Interim Director Eric Kurzejeski kurzejeskie@missouri.edu

Steven's Contact: Allison Pease peasea@missouri.edu

Fisheries Chief Bruce Drecktrah is on the advisory board.

Review of state agency fish chief priorities

Jason Olive, SDAFS past president sent the results of a survey of fish chiefs for needs or desires of SDAFS technical committees. We briefly reviewed last year. The survey helped identify common themes of areas of need. Some things easy to accomplish would be compiling a summary of fishing regulations specific to small impoundments and on a finer scale urban fisheries. Also, have a column for whether paddle craft are allowed on small lakes. We can send out a request to each state to fill out regs for their respective states and report back to fish chiefs and EXCOMM. Will send out template and timeline before next annual meeting. Do we need standardized sampling for small impoundment across states? Some states don't have SOP for small impoundments, only major reservoirs and streams, rivers. Can we send out form on frequency or surveys, methodology for assessing? Hang onto that fish chief list and we will revisit at a later date. Maybe collaborative effort with other committees like catfish on recruitment in small impoundments.

New Business

New member appointment(s) and vacancies

There is a difference between being a voting member and participating in meetings. There is a process for appointment and approving members. We can add members to the email list if you are interested in participating in the future.

Aquatic Plant Workshop

The workshop was very popular, and we got some good feedback. The worst feedback was because we didn't send out the documentation that we promised. We didn't get it completed and the Mississippi State extension put out an aquatic plant publication that covered most of what we did. This publication was shared with committee members before the meeting. Graves agrees that the survey we sent out was unique and we did have some biological controls which the book does not have. However, the biological controls was the biggest area we couldn't get folks to agree on. The herbicide control and id sections of the MS book are very good. Cynthia is doing the last few edits to the PowerPoint and the cards on the table and send out to everyone that attended the workshop. We hope to continue to offer this workshop in the future because it was hands on and some great materials. Maybe partner with publishers of the book and use the book as a guide or provide book as part of fee for the workshop. Private sector biologists were very helpful with their presentations. Maybe do workshop every 3 or 5 years. Source of consistent funding for SIC and good training of new students or young professionals. Useful to have updates on new herbicides on the market as new things come out along the lines of every 3-5 years. 9 votes for every 3 years, 5 votes for every 5 years. SEPRO lab may have some plants from their lab for future workshops. 2026 is in New Orleans and would be next time for workshop on 3 year rotation. Graves did a great job collecting plants, but need to spread the work around next time, so it's not too hard on one person. Frozen plants did very well and were good specimens when thawed out. If we don't send out survey every time, it would save a lot of the work we did for the workshop.

Gene Gilliland with B.A.S.S. let folks know about the Bass Fishing HOF grant and the Bassmaster AFCA grant. Can apply for both grants and can copy and paste grant applications. Grants are related to bass and can include habitat projects.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:45 pm.



The Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society

Small Impoundments Technical Committee

2024 Annual SDAFS Meeting Agenda

1 February 2024, 1:00-4:00 pm EST

1:00* – Roll Call (There will be a virtual attendance option)

1:10 – Introduction (Cynthia)

- Determine quorum (Dane)

1:20 – Meeting Minutes and Treasurer's Report (Dane)

1:30 – Member Updates (all state representatives) ***Not a review of reports, just highlights of work going on in small impoundments in your state.***

2:00 – Old Business

- Workshop Effectiveness quiz and feedback survey (publication)
- SIC Facebook (Post! Post! Post!)
- SIC Website update(s)
- Committee member list
- Student and Young Professional Engagement and Recruitment
- Review of State Agency Fish Chief's Priorities – What can we do?

3:00 – New Business

- New member appointment(s) and vacancies
- Aquatic Plant Workshop – 2026? 2028?

4:00 – Adjourn

***All times are estimates**

FISH CHIEFS SURVEY RESPONSES

Small Impoundments TC-

RESEARCH

- 1) Evaluation of urban fishing programs
- 2) Evaluating the amount of coverage and types artificial and natural habitat structures needed in small impoundments and large reservoirs (PVC cubes, Mossbacks, rock piles, Christmas trees, aquatic vegetation)
- 3) Effects of stocking and habitat enhancement on angler use and retention
- 4) Catchability - How is catchability impacted over time in small impoundments that have high fishing pressure? How to maintain angler satisfaction with catch in self-sustaining, high pressure systems? How does the addition of fish habitat (artificial or natural) impact catchability in the short- and long-term?
- 5) Evaluation of forage stocking
- 6) Effects of stocking put-and-take fisheries on license sales
- 7) Factors affecting Channel Catfish reproductive success or failure after stocking
- 8) Panfish population dynamics/management
- 9) Factors affecting Channel Catfish density and size distribution
- 10) Evaluating water quality and trophic status of small impoundments

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1) Every aspect of small impoundment fisheries management. Many universities don't seem to be teaching the basics of pond management anymore.
- 2) Aquatic vegetation ID and treatment
- 3) New techniques and technologies

OTHER (e.g. symposia, white papers, data summaries, etc.)

- 1) A state summary of services provided relative to on-site technical assistance checks of private ponds.
- 2) A state summary of fishing regulations that are specific to small impoundments (e.g. urban fisheries).
- 3) A state summary of regulations/issues related to use of small impoundments by paddle-craft.
- 4) Development of standard sampling and reporting protocols.