The Vilbig Bass Club is putting their 2016 stocking plan.

Our thoughts are to introduce more adult bass (1 to 3lb) as well as some forage fish. (Threadfin shad).

- This would introduce additional bloodline and genetics

Our bass population appears to be healthy and on track.

Our lake has a heavy population of Gar.

- We would like remove some of the Gar

Rick Huffman contacted Bob Lusk and we had a lengthy conversation.

Rick discussed the possibility of electro shocking to remove some of the Gar and other means of reducing the Gar population as well as our thoughts on stocking Bass and Shad.

Bob's general thoughts in regards to stocking more Bass and Shad are that we do not need to stock at this time. His opinion is that the removal of Gar that compete with the Bass for food and eat smaller Bass would greatly enhance the Bass we already have in place.

In addition to Gar removal, he recommends that additional habitat be constructed in specific area types to provide better cover for the smaller Bass and forage fish.

Rick recommend that we utilize his knowledge and recommendations by addressing the 2 concerns.
In order to reduce the Gar population, a two part approach is needed.

Part One
Electro-shocking 3 times in the year, at a cost of $500 per occurrence. This will require 4 to 5 Vilbig people to net the fish. We could realistically remove 40 to 50 Gar per trip, as well as additional Carp. Bob has offered to assist with disposal of the captured fish.

Part Two
Organize 3 to 4 Gar tournaments each year to help reduce the Gar numbers. This will require some organization and commitment from the Bass Club and members.

The Habitat issue.
There are many varying opinions regarding Habitat.
In order to develop a plan, I believe that a survey, mapping of the lake and recommendations of where and what type of habitat be provided by a professional. This would also require organization and commitment from the Bass Club, its members and the ILA.
Bob has Professionals to perform the task of mapping and providing recommendations for the habitat.
The cost to Map the Lake and provide a Plan would be $1,500.

Once we have a comprehensive plan in hand, we could purchase or create the habitat ourselves.

The Stocking fund is currently at $4,432.
The Electro-shocking costs = $1,500
The Mapping and Recommendation =$1,500
This would leave $1,432 for habitat.
We should reserve some dollars for Gar Tournament incentives

This approach could overlap into multiple years to accomplish the goals.

Below is a copy of Bob Lusk Opinions via Email

Rick,
Good to talk with you right now.

Here are my thoughts.

Looking at last year's report, you guys are slightly bass heavy. Plus, you've stocked Florida strain bass in years past. My opinion is that you have enough bass and you have good genetics.

But, you also have gar, flathead catfish and other species of predator fish which compete in the same food chain as your target species, largemouth bass. Carp take up space and compete in the same food chain as some of your forage fish, such as gizzard shad and young bluegills.

If you can eliminate enough of the non-target predator fish and carp, you will see an increase in the largemouth bass population.

I don't recommend stocking any bass at this time...it won't increase catch rates and the gene pool already has Florida genetics.

But, removing gar and carp could be helpful, if enough can be removed. By itself, electrofishing won't remove enough gar or carp to impact the fish population. But, a combined effort of several electrofishing attempts with some "gar tournaments" could make an impact. I think, collectively, that we'd need to remove 250-400 gar to begin to make a discernible difference to improve the bass fishery.
Another idea is to map the lake and figure as best as we can what habitat is available for the fishery. We've started using side scan sonar to develop contour maps with marked areas where structure and cover exists. "Structure" is defined as permanent habitat such as rock piles, humps, road beds, sunken logs, etc. "Cover" is habitat which ebbs and flows, such as aquatic plants. By mapping the lake, we could see the areas best suited to add structure under the water to create more of a "community" effect, by enhancing what is already there. Remember, "As goes the habitat, so goes what lives in it."
We spoke about forage fish, too. We've had the mildest winter in years and most lakes have really good survival of threadfin shad. As I recall, we saw thousands of threadfins last year. They spawn on grassy shores at daylight and the lake tends to hold a pretty good bloom. My gut feeling is that you don't need to stock threadfins. If you stock them, it does no harm, but is probably not necessary.
Here's my thought process.

1) decrease competition amongst predator species by aggressive harvest.

a) Hold gar and carp tournaments with prizes. (Let's discuss how to dispose of fish...we may be able to help).

b) Electrofishing at the right time...when gar are hovering near aquatic plant beds. $500 per trip, based on scheduling of other work in the area.

2) improve habitat for target species and their prey.

a) Map the lake bottom, including structure and cover, using side scan sonar. We'd charge $1,500 to create the structure map.

b) With the map, design a thoughtful improve strategy.

3) monitor results by keeping good catch records. Catch records can help us track catch rates and growth rates of your fish. The fishing club is passionate about these things and should take the lead.

a) Anglers keep records of man-hours fished, lengths and weights of bass caught, plotted on the map where fish were caught.

Those my thoughts for the day.

Bob Lusk
Fisheries biologist