HARDEE LAKES PARK
FISH MANAGEMENT AREA

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
In Cooperation with:
Hardee County Board of County Commissioners
Parks and Recreation Department
205 Hanchey Road
Wahula, FL 33873
863/773-3419
For boat fishing reservations call: 863/773-6788

ESTABLISHED TO MAINTAIN QUALITY FISHING THROUGH BIOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT, WITH COOPERATION FROM ANGLERS
was completed by the late 1980’s. The 1,150 acre tract containing four lakes was conveyed by JMC Phosphates Company to Hardee County to establish a public recreational park. The lakes range in size from 47 to 133 acres. The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission established the park as a Fish Management Area in 2000; however, the park was not open to the public at the time, so fishing was not allowed. Hardee County was awarded a grant for park development from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and construction of the park began. The park is still being developed; however, in January 2004, Lakes 1 (133 acres) and 2 (125 acres) were opened to fishing with tight restrictions on harvest, and Lakes 3 (83 acres) and 4 (47 acres) closed due to lack of access and fish management activities. Lake 3 should be open in late 2004 when access is improved, and Lake 4 in another year depending on how the fishery responds to management activities.

**FISH MANAGEMENT:**

The four lakes are typical reclaimed phosphate lakes; extremely fertile with irregular bottoms and a littoral shelf that supports excellent emergent macrophyte communities (i.e. bulrush, pickerelweed). Fish population sampling from the mid-1990’s to present indicate excellent sportfisheries (largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, and black crappie) exist in Lakes 1, 2, and 3 while Lake 4 supported a fish community dominated by tilapia with very few sport fish. Lakes 1 and 3 are stocked with channel catfish to provide additional opportunities for anglers. Lake 3 is also stocked with sunshine bass (hybrid striped bass) as an additional angling opportunity. Lake 4 requires intensive management to support a sport fish population. Tilapia and gizzard shad dominated the fish population following several major fish kills (caused by low dissolved oxygen) in the 1990’s. The plan was to remove the undesirable species and replace them with sport fish. This plan required the lake to be “renovated”, or completely killed out, prior to restocking efforts. The renovation began in April 2003 with the complete kill and removal of all fish from the lake. Within a month of the renovation, fingerling largemouth bass were stocked, along with transplanted adult largemouth bass, bluegill, and redear sunfish to promote natural reproduction. The sport fish populations in Lake 4 are progressing well, and should allow for a fishery to develop in about two years.

**RULES AND REGULATIONS:**

1. A fishing license is required for residents from 16 to 64 years of age, and for nonresidents 16 or more years of age, to fish by any method, including cane poles, on a Fish Management Area, unless otherwise exempt.

2. All anglers and commercial fishers shall enter at the Park main entrance (Ollie Roberts Road), the designated entry point, unless otherwise instructed.

3. Angling from a boat and all commercial fishing is allowed by daily permit issued by Hardee County. Angling from shore does not require a daily permit unless otherwise posted at the Park main entrance.

4. Days and hours of operation and quotas shall be as designated by Hardee County and posted at the Park main entrance. Fishing is permitted in designated lakes only. All other lakes and restricted areas so posted are closed to public fishing. Any lake may be closed to public access for management purposes, or in the event that access to the lake exposed the public to danger, by posted notice at the Park main entrance.

5. Tilapia (Oreochromis aurea) may be removed from designated lakes by cast nets only under permits issued by Hardee County. Without a commercial fishing permit issued by Hardee County, the use and possession of castnets and minnow seines are prohibited. The harvest of catfish by castnet or seine is prohibited.

6. All black bass must be released immediately.

7. Sunshine bass daily bag limit: 6

8. Panfish (bluegill and redear sunfish) daily bag limit: 20 in aggregate

9. Black crappie daily bag limit: 10 No person shall kill or possess any crappie that is less than 10 inches in total length.

10. Catfish daily bag limit: 6

11. Fish may not be filleted, nor their head or tail fin removed, until the angler has left the Park. Disposal of fish remains is prohibited.

12. Guns are prohibited.

13. Motor vehicles may be operated only on designated roads, parking areas, and boat ramps.

14. No person shall park any vehicle in a manner that obstructs a road, boat ramp, gate, or fire lane.

15. Swimming and float tubes are prohibited.

16. All watercraft shall be operated at idle speed only.

**RESERVATIONS:**

Hardee Lakes Park Fish Management Area is open to angling on weekends only. Anglers wishing to fish the lakes by boat will be required to have reservations. To get a reservation you must call 863/773-6788 on Monday (for the following Saturday) or Tuesday (for the following Sunday) and leave your name and phone number so that a Hardee County representative can return your call and notify you if a reservation for that particular day is available. Bank anglers are not required to have a reservation, and can just show up at the Park entrance. All vehicles will be charged a $2.00 entrance fee to the Park. You will receive an information packet containing park rules and fishing and boating regulations.

**HISTORY:**

Hardee Lakes Park was mined during the early 1980’s, and post mining reclamation