

# Steps Toward Good Pond Fishing

By SCS TECHNICIAN  
Holt County Staff

If you are interested in fishing, you will be interested to know what the Holt Soil Conservation district supervisors and the Soil Conservation Service technicians are doing to provide better-pond fishing.

Holt county has many locations where excellent stock water ponds have been established. There are still many places where new ones can be built. Generally, after the ponds are filled the water is stocked with fish from one source or another. Fishing ranges from poor to fairly good in such ponds. If proper planning had been done before the ponds were constructed, fishing could have been improved in nearly every instance. This article is designed to point

out some steps necessary to make the farm pond a good fish pond. It should be mentioned that management also plays an important role in the perpetuation of good fishing. A tour of fish ponds was held last year and at each pond recommendations for improvements were made.

It is planned to make such a tour an annual feature of the Soil Conservation District activities.

Soil Conservation Service technicians are trained to analyze the present situations and propose measures that will increase fish production.

A pond of one-half acre will furnish the farm family with plenty of good fishing. For larger ponds, plans should be made to cooperate with neighbors or

clubs, or some other arrangements should be made so that fishing may be heavier but still be controlled. Financial help may often be obtained for establishing and managing larger ponds where such arrangements are made.

Following are some suggestions on site selection and construction:

First consideration should be given to the drainage or watershed that supplies the water. It must have a complete conservation program applied before the pond is constructed, in order to insure silt-free water. Water continuously carrying a heavy load of silt will not produce good fishing. The site should be free from excessive flooding.

Water should be at least 10 feet deep over one-third of the pond. Plenty of free water below the ice is necessary to sustain fish life in winter.

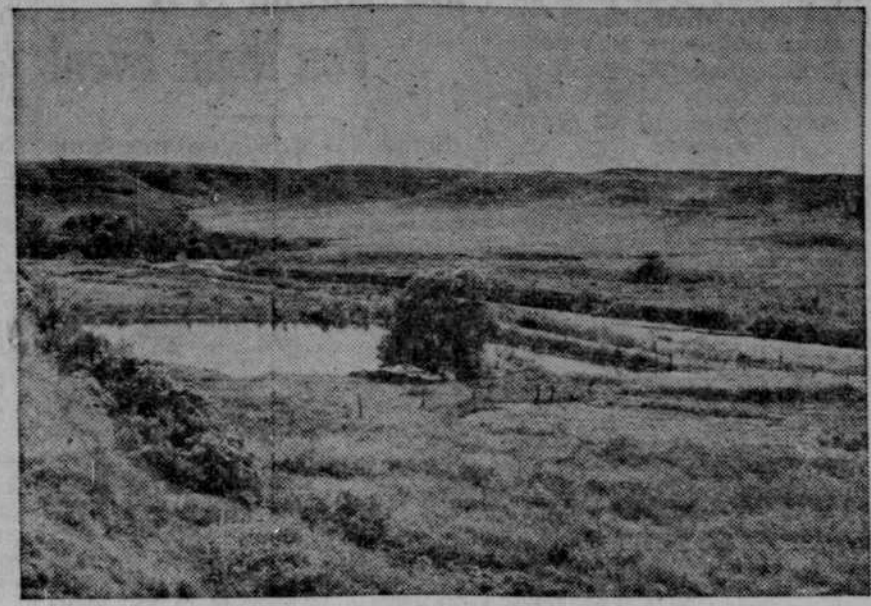
Other features that must be planned for at time of construction are: The shoreline should have a three-to-one slope to prevent weed growth; the planting of the shoreline to Reed's canary grass or other vegetation that will prevent erosion by waves; the installation of a pipe and valve to drain the pond if the pond should become overstocked with stunted fish or if undesirable species such as carp should get into the pond; a spillway wide enough so that the overflow will be shallow to minimize the loss of fish; fencing the entire pond and piping the water to a stock tank located outside the fenced area.

Fencing prevents tramping of the shoreline and shallow water areas which might muddy the water to the extent that fish production becomes difficult. It also assures a relatively pure water supply for livestock by eliminating the pollution and contamination that frequently results in the spread of disease when stock take water directly from the pond. Trees and fruit-producing shrubs may be planted to improve the fenced area as a habitat for wildlife and to produce jelly fruits. The planting should be far enough from the shoreline as not to interfere with fishing.

With the fish pond properly designed, stocking it becomes the important consideration. There are some trout waters in Holt county, and where they exist trout should be given first consideration.

You must be sure, if you want to stock a pond with trout that the water temperature does not stay above 70 degrees for long periods during the summer.

Bass and bluegill are used extensively for stocking ponds not suited for trout because of their difference in food and spawning habits. The bass feed upon small fish but spawn once a year. Bluegill feed mostly upon plankton and small animals, including insects and their larvae, and spawn throughout the summer. Bass feeding upon small fish tend



Stockwater pond formed by building an earthen dam across a natural drainage and providing an adequate spillway. Such a pond can furnish, in addition to water for livestock, a place for recreation if stocked with fish, and wildlife habitat if fenced.—Photo by Soil Conservation Service.

to hold the bluegill in balance with their food supply, otherwise we would end up with a pond full of stunted bluegill. Upon application to the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service (blanks are available at the local soil conservation district office) small fish may be secured to stock small ponds at the recommended rate. These fish are available at no cost and the pond owner may still regulate fishing as he wishes.

Many of the ponds that have been stocked do not produce good fishing. They should be studied thoroughly to find what is wrong before it is restocked or altered.

Some of the reasons for poor fishing in old ponds are:

1. Too much silt in water—additional conservation practices may be needed in the drainage or contiguous pond area.
2. Infertile water—not enough food for fish to make any growth. The application of fertilizer should correct this situation.
3. Water too shallow—fish suffocate in shallow ponds that freeze over for any length of time. Winter losses can be especially heavy if the ice becomes covered with snow.
4. Too many fish—caused by failure to remove annual crop, resulting in large numbers of stunted fish. In other words, not

enough fishing.

5. Improper water temperature—too cold for bass and bluegill to reproduce or too warm for trout to live.

Only a minnow seine and a thermometer are needed to inspect ponds. This is the type of equipment used last summer on the tour of fish ponds. The following places were visited: L. G. Genung of Atkinson, Atkinson Fish club; L. C. Richards of Atkinson, Aaron Boshart of O'Neill and Guy L. Johnson of O'Neill.

With a minnow seine, we checked for reproduction. When we found both little bass and little bluegill and we knew there was food for the fish in the pond at that time for only well-fed fish reproduce. All that is left for us to do now is to fish the large ones out, leaving the food for the small ones to grow to edible size.

Here are some situations that may exist in some of the ponds in Holt county, and what to do about them:

1. We might find too many bluegill in relation to the number of bass, or there may be too many bass and too few bluegill. The ratio should be 10 bluegill to one bass. These conditions can result from using the wrong proportionate number of each species of fish when stocking the pond. Or, a dense weed growth

might protect the young bluegill from the bass. Corrective measures here may be quite complicated. If weed growth or moss is protecting the young bluegill, the moss or weeds must be destroyed. If the pond has been constructed so that there is only a small amount of shallow water around the edges and the shores have been planted to Reed's canary grass or other desirable vegetation, the weeds or moss can usually be eliminated by proper fertilization. Then if the pond is not overcrowded, addition of the missing species will improve the fishing. If the pond is overcrowded, however, these fish must be removed and the pond restocked at the proper rate in fertile waters.

2. If both bluegill and bass are found in sufficient numbers but are small, lack of fertility or an inadequate supply of food is the cause of poor fishing. The application of fertilizer should correct this situation.
3. If bluegill alone are found, the addition of adult bass and heavy fishing for bluegill will bring the fish population in balance. Since adult bass are difficult to obtain, the alternative is to clean out the bluegill and start over.
4. If most of the bluegill are large, it means that there are too many large bass which eat all the small bluegill. Fish for the large bass, and follow by fertilization to provide more food for the bluegill.
5. Where any one species of game fish increases beyond the carrying capacity of the water, resulting in small stunted fish, the pond is referred to as being out of balance. When ordinary management practices fail to bring the pond back into balance, all fish should be removed and the water restocked with recommended numbers and desired species. If carp or other undesirable species inhabit the water they must be removed before stocking with game fish.

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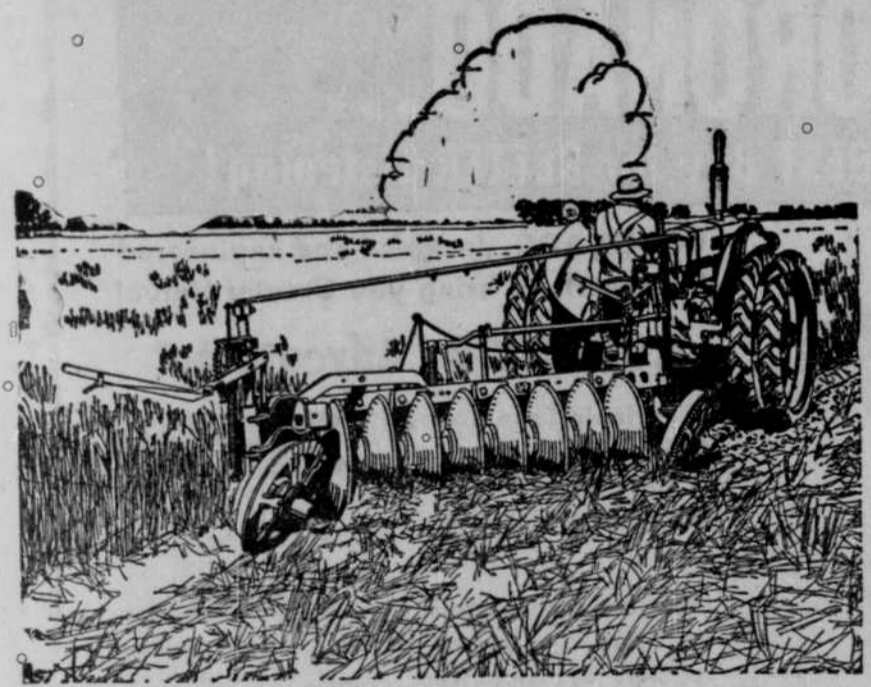
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