

FALL / WINTER POND ACTIVITIES

By John Stahl, northwest region Fisheries supervisor

Hopefully the heat of summer is winding down as we start to see the signs of fall around us – light jackets needed in the morning, a few early flights of ducks and a little color change in the leaves. Now is a great time to plan for fall hunting seasons, afternoon drives to look at fall colors and management activities for farm ponds.

Fall and winter can be excellent times for farm pond management. Pond owners can accomplish a lot during the fall and winter, and should strive to meet management objectives just as a good gardener makes preparations to their garden for winter's rest after the first frost each year.

Early fall is an excellent time for draw-downs. The pond level is slowly dropped to expose a few feet of shoreline. This damp soil can be planted with rye or Japanese millet to help hold the soil in place and provide food and cover for waterfowl during the winter and young fish when it floods the following spring.

Fall draw-downs will also help control aquatic weeds. Weeds exposed by the draw-down will freeze, thaw, dehydrate and die and will not come back as quickly the next year. Water level manipulation can also help control overabundant sunfish and baitfish populations. Dropping the water level will pull small fish out of the shallows and cover, and make them available to larger predators in the main pool.

Fall and winter can produce some excellent farm pond angling. Crappie present in ponds should be caught and removed and this is

a great time of year to fish for them. Gear your tackle down to ultra-lights with 4- to 6-pound test and small lures and bait. Fish around structure or retrieve slowly and enjoy the results as this technique can produce a variety of farm pond species.

Winter is also the time to control muskrats and beavers. These animals can do a great deal of damage to a pond dam and are very active during the winter. It is a lot cheaper to trap and shoot beaver and muskrat rather than rebuild a dam and the local game warden can approve these activities.

Wintertime trout

Late fall, winter and early spring is a good time to enjoy a cool season rainbow trout fisheries. Farm ponds can provide that opportunity and trout are available from commercial dealers in surrounding states.

However, landowners are required to apply for a permit before stocking trout into their pond and should never stock exotic fish, vegetation or other aquatic life into Oklahoma's public waters. Landowners can contact Paul Balkenbush at 918/683-1031 for a trout stocking application.

The application is easy to complete and should be returned with information providing county, directions to the pond and number of trout requested to the Department. The appropriate regional fisheries supervisor will inspect the pond and make the decision to approve the application.

The process takes two to four weeks to complete and a letter will inform the landowner of the decision. Once approved, trout can be delivered to the pond.

