

Cure the bends without fizzing

LA MESA, Calif. — Although venting, or “fizzing,” has proved to be an effective way of treating bass afflicted with barotrauma (the “bends”), many anglers still are a bit squeamish about the idea of puncturing a fish’s side with a needle.

For those fishermen, EcoLeeser has created the RokLees, a mouth clip that allows a fish to be quickly lowered back to the depths where it was caught. It was invented for anglers pulling marine rockfish from as deep as 360 feet along the California coast, but it seems just as well suited for largemouth bass caught at depths of 35 or 40 feet.

“We would like to focus on freshwater fishing club personnel responsible for returning fish to the water after and during competi-

tions,” said co-inventor Randy Hupp, adding that the invention should be ideal for bass caught in very deep water.

Barotrauma can occur in rockfish, bass and other fish when they are caught in deep water and pulled to the surface. Their swim bladders, which serve as internal buoyancy mechanisms, don’t have time to adjust to the rapid decrease in water pressure.

Fish afflicted with barotrauma can’t return to deep water on their own. Instead, they become “floaters,” often dying of shock. Bloating and bulging eyes are additional symptoms, as is an esophagus pushed out through the mouth by the overinflated bladder.

When properly done, venting deflates the bladder and allows the fish to descend.

The RokLees, by contrast, offers a noninvasive way of dealing with the bends. An angler simply attaches the padded device to the fish’s lower jaw, adds a weight, and lowers his catch back down. A quick jerk on the rod releases the fish.

Hupp added that fish typically don’t have to be lowered all the way back to the depth where they were caught. “If we caught a fish at 130 feet, we’ve found that we just have to drop them to 33,” he said. “You’ll feel the fish start to get lively as you get it in the right depth range.”

The clip retails for less than \$40, with only one size available. Additional sizes are being considered, as is a clip that could handle several fish at one time.

To learn more, go to www.ecoleeser.com.

ROBERT MONTGOMERY



The RokLees was invented for releasing deep-caught saltwater fish, but it works for largemouth bass as well.

Photo courtesy of EcoLeeser

Marcellus shale alliance founded

ARLINGTON, Va. — Led by Trout Unlimited (TU), the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA) and others, sportsmen groups have united to urge government officials to better protect fish, waters and wildlife from the impacts of extracting natural gas. Waters particularly at risk, the groups contend, include rivers and streams in New York, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

“A number of key organizations have joined forces to give sportsmen and sportswomen an opportunity to be heard,” said TU’s Katy Dunlap, “so that together we can advocate for common-sense policies and practices to ensure that Marcellus Shale gas development does not negatively impact sportsmen’s interests.”

The Sportsmen’s Alliance for Marcellus Conservation

includes Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, New York State Trappers Association, Quality Deer Management Association, Pennsylvania Forest Coalition and The Wildlife Society.

The alliance is not opposed to gas extracting, and it does recognize the potential economic benefits. Rather, it is concerned that current regulations do not adequately protect natural resources.

“Our members are very concerned about the impacts of hydraulic fracturing on water resources, fish and wildlife, and outdoor recreation,” said IWLA’s Scott Kovarovich. “The Sportsmen’s Alliance’s common-sense recommendations strike the right balance between energy development and conserving the region’s most important natural resources.”

BT STAFF REPORT

Texas drought impacts fisheries

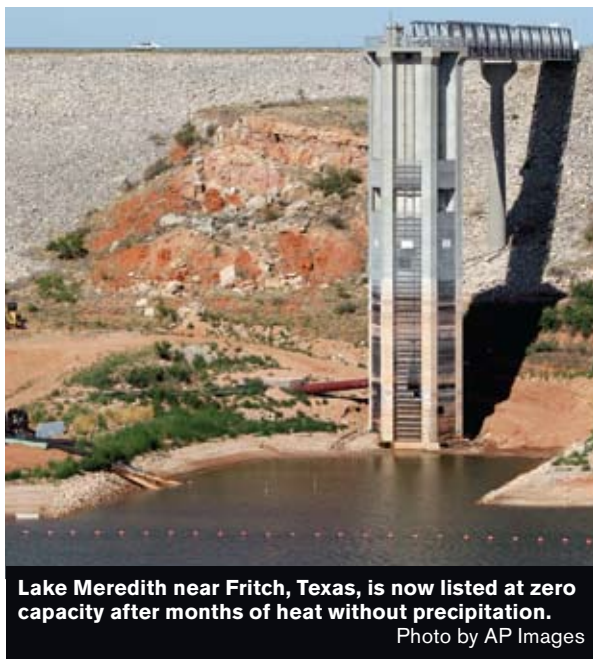
ATHENS, Texas — One of the worst droughts in Texas history is increasingly threatening fish in the state’s reservoirs and streams.

After the hottest June ever recorded in Texas, the dry heat continued through July as the drought became the third-worst on record with nearly 98 percent of the state in one stage of drought or another.

“With continued lack of rainfall, we could see impacts on fish and wildlife that could be apparent for years to come,” said Cindy Loeffler, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department’s (TPWD) top water resource expert. “When you see these historically low levels of stream flows, we begin to see fish kills from low dissolved oxygen and high temperature.”

Across the state, many rivers were trickling and lake levels were extremely low, especially in west Texas and the panhandle. Lakes Baylor near Childress and O.C. Fisher in San Angelo have dried up. “Lake Meredith is listed at zero capacity,” said TPWD biologist Charlie Munger.

Other panhandle and west Texas reservoirs ranged from



Lake Meredith near Fritch, Texas, is now listed at zero capacity after months of heat without precipitation. Photo by AP Images

Worth area. “Heavy rainfall in the Rio Grande watershed in 2010 filled both Lake Amistad and Falcon Lake,” said TPWD biologist Randy Myers. “With the current drought, water levels in both reservoirs should decrease but not reach problematic levels this year.”

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less than 1 percent capacity (E.V. Spence near San Angelo) to 46 percent full (Oak Creek Reservoir near Sweetwater). “High evaporation rates and abstraction for municipal water supply are taking a toll,” said TPWD biologist Mukhtar Farooqi.

Lower lake levels will affect fish reproduction in the short term, said TPWD fisheries biologist Craig Bonds. “Degraded habitat will likely result in poor reproductive success for many sport and prey fishes. However, one poor year-class does not pose long-term problems.”

Thunderstorms that swept across extreme north Texas in early summer boosted water levels in lakes around the Dallas-Fort

CONSERVATION BRIEFS

New laws

► **Texas** — A new state law will require mandatory boater education for more people in Texas, beginning Sept. 1. Supporters claim the move will save lives and make crowded waters safer. Changes to Texas laws targeting boating safety include mandatory boating safety education certification for anyone born on or after Sept. 1, 1993, to operate a vessel with a motor more than 15 horsepower or a wind-driven vessel measuring more than 14 feet in length. Previously, only 13- to 17-year-olds were required to complete a boating safety course to operate a vessel without adult supervision.

► **North Carolina** — The North Carolina General Assembly has approved a new law requiring hunters and anglers to obtain written permission from a landowner or leaseholder before hunting or fishing on privately owned, posted property. The Landowner Protection Act also allows landowners to post their lands to by applying vertical purple paint marks on posts and trees, or by placing signs and posters.

Invasives update

► **Missouri** — Follow-up testing at Pomme de Terre Lake has given the southwest Missouri reservoir a clean bill of health regarding invasive zebra mussels. Laboratory testing of water samples collected by the Missouri Department of Conservation in spring 2009

detected the microscopic larval form of zebra mussels from three sample sites. In fall 2009 and 2010, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) collected additional water samples from the lake, and no zebra mussels were detected. Both agencies conducted independent samplings at Pomme de Terre in 2011 and again, neither detected zebra mussels.

► **Kansas** — Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced that zebra mussels have been found in Council Grove Reservoir in Morris County and Melvern Reservoir in Osage County. “We expected Council Grove Reservoir because zebra mussels naturally move downstream, and they were found in Council Grove City Lake last July,” said Jason Goekler, KDWP aquatic nuisance specialist. “The Melvern infestation is a different story because it could have been prevented. I still think we can prevent further spread of aquatic nuisance species if lake users will follow a few basic precautions.”

► **Nevada** — A bill signed by Gov. Brian Sandoval allows the Nevada Department of Wildlife to develop a coordinated statewide aquatic invasive species management plan to control and prevent species such as quagga mussels, *didymo*, Asian clams, curly leaf pondweed, Northern pike and others. The bill makes it illegal to deliberately introduce invasive species into Nevada waters, and violators could face fines of \$25,000 to \$250,000.

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High temperatures may be zapping zebra mussels in Missouri

OSAGE BEACH, Mo. — The sizzling summer heat has actually brought some relief to a couple of bass fisheries infested with zebra mussels.

The invasive species was found in Lake of the Ozarks five years ago and has expanded throughout the lower end of the lake and downstream from Bagnell Dam into the Osage River.

“They spread like wildfire the first couple of years they were in here,” said Greg Stoner, Missouri Department of Conservation fisheries biologist. “The last two summers we have had some real warm spells, and I think the temperature stress has really knocked down the population. For a long time I was getting calls from guys who said they were

fishing a jig and hooked onto a stick in 20 feet of water and when they pulled it up, it was full of zebra mussels. I haven’t had a call like that in two years.”

When Stoner recently checked a monitor under a dock at the epicenter of the zebra mussel infestation, he could not find a single live mussel. The fisheries biologist said

a combination of predators, water temperatures in the 80s and 90s and disease has led to the significant decline in zebra mussels on his home waters.

A similar phenomenon has occurred at Lake Dardanelle in Arkansas, where zebra mussels used to cover logs and the roots of water willows.

“You just don’t see them as much in the shallow water, but they are still here,” said Bob Limbird, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission district fisheries supervisor. “After the water temperature gets to 85 degrees and stays there any amount of time, there is a die-off down to 12 feet where the water is not as hot.”

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