

Improving fishing habitat in Lake Mildred and Clear Lake

One of the many reasons we love Lake Mildred is the clear clean water and the easy navigation we enjoy around the entire lake. If you have participated in any of the numerous discussions we have had at Association meetings and remember what Onterra reported (the research firm that studied Lake Mildred a few years ago) you will recall that the clear water and lack of substantial aquatic vegetation does reduce the natural reproduction levels of our native fish. The lack of dense cover not only makes it more difficult for small fry to avoid predators, it also reduces the amount of phytoplankton growth in the lake that small fry feed on. These factors and the lack of good spawning areas limit the natural reproduction in Lake Mildred. It is why we have implemented a walleye stocking program in Lake Mildred and have been encouraging catch and release. Clear Lake has more substantial aquatic vegetation and wood in the lake that helps create better fish habitat for protection of small fry.

There have been numerous conversations about how we might be able to improve the fish habitat in Lake Mildred and Clear Lake without drastically changing or damaging the quality of the lakes. The Lake Association has set aside funds for potential projects. There are numerous projects that have been done by the DNR and lake associations to improve fish habitat. Which project is best for a particular lake is dependent on a number of factors. Just a few factors include 1. The amount of development on the lake impacts the amount of available shoreline that can be altered. 2. The contour of the waterway bed (for example, it cannot exceed a slope of 4-foot horizontal to one-foot vertical for some habitat projects). 3. The presence of flats that provide sufficient space and depth for installing nesting cover devices. 4. Availability of suitable shoreline trees that can be used for a tree drop project.

Improving habitat is more complicated than it first might seem. Projects can dramatically and negatively affect the lakes, navigation routes, neighbors whose property is next to the project and so on. Depending on what is done, it can also create a dangerous condition. For example, if you were to simply cut down a tree and fall it into the lake without properly securing it to the shore with heavy cables, it can float out and create a very dangerous situation for boats. And we might think something is a good idea when it really doesn't do any good to improve the habitat.

Because we need to proceed cautiously the Association is establishing a group of interested property owners from both lakes to research what are the best ways we can improve the fish habitat. Working with the DNR, the group will develop possible projects for the two lakes. The Association strongly believes that we should not do anything without carefully researching the full impact of possible projects. If you are interested in joining this group please join us on May 28th. We will meet immediately following the Lake Association Memorial Day weekend meeting.