



Anglers vs. Property Owners

NEARLY 25 YEARS ago, grass carp decimated a prime bass fishery at Texas' Lake Conroe, about 50 miles north of Houston.

"First they ate the hydrilla and then they ate all of the native vegetation, leaving us with only brushpiles," says Ron Gunter, vice president of Seven Coves Bass Club.

Now, with grass and bass back, club members are trying to keep history from repeating itself. Remembering what happened back in the early 1980s, they are avoiding conflict and confrontation. They are acting, instead of reacting.

"Battles don't work," says Gunter, pointing out that, despite angler opposition and a two-year lawsuit more than two decades ago, 180,000 grass carp were released into Lake Conroe.

"We're not against the homeowners," he continues. "This time around, we are communicating with them. We want to correlate our needs with theirs."

The club's intent is to keep a healthy population of native plants growing in Lake

Conroe. Additionally, half of the funding for the \$68,000 project comes from a More Fish Partnership grant provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Sixteen of these grants were awarded during the 2007 Bassmaster Classic week in Birmingham, Ala., with three state Federation Nation chapters — Arkansas, Ohio and Oklahoma — as recipients. Seven Coves was the only individual club to be awarded a grant.

Seven Coves decided to attempt this approach after several members attended a Lake Conroe Association (LCA) board meeting about hydrilla control during summer 2006. "We (anglers) were outnumbered 25 to 200 or 300," Gunter says.

Kerry Sanders, Russ Clark and Gunter decided that they would do something to show property owners that anglers are more broad-minded and cooperative than lakefront property owners believe them to be. Conferring with TPWD's Mark Webb and Texas Federation Nation Conservation Director Tim Cook, they decided to initiate a native vegetation project. With the help of BASS Conservation Director Chris Horton, they then applied for the grant.

Some of the grant money is being used for the purchase of grass carp. "We want to show that we're concerned about their well-being as well as ours," Gunter says. "We want to show them the big picture."

"We have invited the LCA to be a partner in this," he continues, adding that, thus far, the invitation has been refused. "And we've left the door open for the possibility of that happening later."

That likely will not happen. Most waterfront property owners don't care that Lake Conroe once again is a high quality fishery that yielded three bass of 14 pounds or more to the ShareLunker program last year.

Still, Gunter and other Seven Coves members are not discouraged. If they succeed, they realize, they will not only save Lake Conroe as a recreational fishery, but blaze a trail that other angling groups can follow when dealing with similar user conflicts on their own waters.

BASS invites you to get involved. To volunteer to help with grassroots projects that conserve and restore the nation's fisheries and aquatic resources, sign up today for ACT (The Angler Conservation Team), at bassmaster.com/conservation or call 877-BASS USA.



Members of the Seven Coves Bass Club are on a mission to save Lake Conroe.

Conroe, as newly released grass carp gobble up the hydrilla.

"These are juvenile carp," Gunter continues. "Their appetites will grow as they grow. We'll try to stay ahead of them, to get good stocks of water celery and other native species going."

Seven Coves will do this through an on-site plant nursery established with the assistance of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), San Jacinto River Authority, Texas Master Naturalists and neighboring bass clubs.