

November 2018 Crawfish Newsletter

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Prepare For Crawfish Harvest

Ponds have been flooded for a month or so and farmers are preparing for crawfish harvesting. It is time to check the traps, make repairs to the boat and plan your pattern of trap placement in the pond. For many farmers, the end of last year's crawfish season coincided with rice planting and other farm activities such that repair and maintenance of crawfish traps and boats were postponed. Well, the time has come to take care of those chores.



Traps go through a lot of rough handling over the course of a season. The sides and funnels get bent and some of the rods and plastic tops become loose. It is time to sort through the pile of old traps and see how many are still good and how many need to be replaced. Sometimes it's just a matter of re-shaping the funnels or fixing the rod attachment or adding a few rings where the plastic top is attached to the wire. If the funnel openings are bent closed, crawfish cannot get in, if the funnels are bent close to the bottom, too many crawfish will escape. Such traps will waste your time and bait and cost you money every time you run the pond. It is worth the expense to repair or replace bad traps.

Boats have been sitting under a shed or in some cases still in the field for the past five months. Bearings on wheels need to be checked and greased. Check hydraulic hoses for cracking or leaks. Change the oil and spark plug in the engine as well as clean out any old gas that might still be in the gas tank or carburetor. Change the muffler if that is rusted out. Grease any other pivot points on the wheels or steering joints. Do whatever preventive maintenance that is needed while the boat is in the shop. It will be easier to repair it now than to have a breakdown in the middle of the pond in January.



Gather all the other harvesting gear that you know you will need: things like gloves, buckets, slicker suits and boots. Get one or two burlap tarps to cover the sacks of crawfish while fishing or hauling them to the buyer. Keeping the sacks wet and out of the wind and sun will reduce much of the dead loss problem.

Soon after flood-up, crawfish are mostly near the edges of the pond, not far from the burrows where they spent the summer. The hold-over crawfish spend time feeding and eventually disperse into the rest of the pond. The newly hatched young crawfish hide in the shallow water near the edges for the first few weeks before venturing out into the deeper water as they increase in size. Depending on water quality, food, cover and density of the crawfish population, the young-of-the-year crawfish will reach harvest size by February. The hold-over crawfish are the ones that are available to harvest starting in November/December.

The number of traps needed to adequately harvest a pond depends on the crawfish population that is likely in the pond. A new pond or a pond that has a light population needs only about 10 to 15 traps per acre. Older ponds with an accumulated population of crawfish need more, as many as 18 to 20 traps per acre. Traps should be as evenly spaced as possible throughout the pond. The distance between the rows of traps and the distance from one trap to the next will determine the number of traps per acre. Traps spaced 50 feet apart will give a fisherman enough time to empty the trap and re-bait in time to set that trap down and grab the next one. If the rows are spaced 50 feet apart, that will result in 17 traps per acre. Shortening either dimension will increase the traps per acre, lengthening either distance will reduce the number per acre. A spacing of 60 feet between traps and 60 feet between rows will result in 12 traps per acre. Reference the following table to see which combination is best suited for your particular pond.

Spacing of Crawfish Traps

Distance Between Traps	Distance Between Rows	Number of Traps per Acre
40	50	22
40	60	18
40	72	15
45	70	14
45	80	12
50	80	11
50	50	17

50	60	15
60	60	12
66	66	10
60	70	10

More information concerning harvesting and crawfish pond management can be found in the Louisiana Crawfish Production Manual available from the LSU AgCenter online at:
<https://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/livestock/aquaculture/crawfish>