

# We've launched a new era of fish management. . .



Kenneth D. Haddad  
*Executive Director  
Florida Fish  
and Wildlife  
Conservation  
Commission*

The new facility is more than a hatchery. It's a state-of-the-art laboratory for studying the unique Florida largemouth bass that is native only to peninsular Florida.



Florida has invested \$17.5 million to conserve and enhance a multi-billion-dollar renewable resource, and the return to Floridians is going to be tremendous.

The Feb. 23 dedication of the new Florida Bass Conservation Center launched a new era of research, production, stocking and management of the legendary fish that attracts millions of anglers to Florida's waters from around the world. The conservation center replaced the outdated 42-year-old Richloom Fish Hatchery, previously on the same site at Webster, in Sumter County.

The new facility is more than a hatchery. It's a state-of-the-art laboratory for studying the unique species that is native only to peninsular Florida. It has its own pathology and genetics facilities. It will have a staff of 11 to study and monitor Florida largemouth bass and other game fish from their beginnings as eggs to their release into the wild when they are 4-6 inches long.

Researchers and other workers at the 39,000-square-foot main building will control temperature, water quality and even simulated daylight hours to ensure the best possible conditions for fish to develop. The center also has 63 ponds for growing valuable sport fish.

While researchers learn more about nutritional and environmental needs of Florida largemouth bass, others will work the hatchery, turning out 6 million largemouth bass a year, which could include up to 1 million 4-inch largemouths, along with 5 million other fish, including smaller bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, striped bass, hybrid striped bass/white bass, black crappie, channel catfish, white catfish and grass carp. That's triple the capacity of the old hatchery, and the new technology that goes into the design and operation of the center is the best available. A major advantage is that no water will discharge from the center to create even marginal pollution effects, and up to 90 percent of the water can be recycled, vastly reducing the drain on the aquifer.

Ultimately, the new 186-acre facility will have a public education complex and visitor center to offer everyone who is interested a wealth of information about conservation, fisheries, fishing techniques and aquatic habitats. It will even have a recreational fishing pond for educational and outreach purposes and to enable visiting families to test their skills. We expect it will turn into a tourist attraction that will serve the dual purpose of sharing vital conservation stewardship messages. The FWC will rely on private donations and corporate sponsors for that component of the complex.

Other features of the center's plan are a comprehensive library and Internet data center and facilities to host scientists from universities, government agencies and the private sector to conduct the highest levels of research. In addition to scientific facts, the database will include angler use, angler success and bass growth rate information for various lakes to help anglers plan fishing opportunities more effectively than ever before. **FW**