Fish Population Control

Pond owners sometimes need to reduce or eliminate fish populations before further management. An older pond may have become contaminated with undesirable fish, such as carp, suckers or bullheads. A trout pond may contain unwanted warmwater fishes which are competing for food and reducing trout growth and survival. It may be that a pond has suffered a winterkill for one kind of fish but not for others, disrupting the predator-prey balance. Or perhaps panfish are overabundant and stunted. When such situations occur, various methods exist to alter fish population structure or remove the population completely.

Intensive Angling

It is often thought that panfish overabundance can be prevented or remedied by fishing hard and keeping many. That's fine in theory, but almost nobody has time for enough fishing to accomplish it. For reducing panfish overpopulation, angling is rarely effective. To best prevent overabundance follow the harvest suggestions outlined in Chapter 7 of this bulletin.

Predator Stocking

Some people reason that stocking northern pike, muskellunge or walleyes should result in panfish control. But in numerous efforts to achieve this, there isn't one well-recorded example of success.

Bluegills and other sunfish have deep bodies with a spiny fin along the back, and predators must have especially large throats to swallow them. Although largemouth bass attain the necessary throat size at a smaller size and earlier age than other piscivorous fishes do, they do not keep bluegill populations in check in Michigan.

All piscivorous fishes, including largemouth bass, much prefer to eat forage fishes that are more cigar-shaped and lack spiny fins. Thus, no predator fishes eat many panfish until other, more convenient prey, such as minnows, are used up.

Having northern pike in bass-bluegill ponds often results in more predation on bass than on bluegills. Even though they also have spines, bass are less deep-bodied and are easier for pike to swallow.

Control of carp and suckers in ponds is rarely achieved by introducing large predators. By the time suckers or carp become a problem, they are usually too large and numerous for piscivorous fish to achieve control.

Spawning Bed Destruction

Some people have tried to control sunfish populations by destroying their eggs, either through raking or trampling the nests. However, you have to get almost every nest to be effective. Sunfish spawn over such a long period, hatch in so few days, and hatch so many fry in each nest that such control is a long, hard task with high risk of failure. Even if it were effective, the result wouldn't be worth the effort.

Cover Reduction

Panfish can rapidly overpopulate a pond when cover in which they can hide from predators is abun-