

## Pre-Historic Fish Cuts Costs, Brings New Revenue

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HOPKINS COUNTY, KY (6/27/12)—For all of mankind's advances in **technology**, some of the most efficient and cost effective solutions to an issue may lay right in front of us in the **natural** world—a fact that the **City of Madisonville** is now experiencing firsthand.

Though the idea may seem strange at first glance, the introduction of a large, pre-historic fish species known as “**paddlefish**” or “**spoonbill catfish**” into local bodies of water has resulted in several benefits according to officials at Madisonville's Water Filtration Department.

Beginning in October nearly six years ago, the City of Madisonville and an aquaculture firm known as **Aquila International** began working together to bring the non-invasive fish species into both Pee Wee Lake and Grapevine Lake for the eventual harvest of **caviar** (edible fish eggs).

“The paddlefish are not for the public to take out. They are being raised for a specific purpose,” says Madisonville's Water Filtration Superintendent, Keith Curneal. “The fish themselves date back to pre-historic times and they are known as a ‘filter fish.’ They swim continuously with their long, bill-like mouth wide open and they filter out zooplankton for food. They are being raised for their eggs, which are the closest in similarity to the most widely used caviar eggs produced by sturgeons.”

As Curneal explained to SurfKY News, both the fish and their eggs are harvested every 8-10 years (around 2 years from from this upcoming October). Once sold on the market by Aquila International, the City of Madisonville will receive a percentage of the resulting profit for providing the proper breeding grounds.

However, there are other somewhat unexpected benefits that have come along with the ancient fish species as well.

“Since they are filter fish, they've helped to cut down on the amount of algae growth we have in the lakes,” said Curneal. “As a result, we are saving a very notable amount of money on the cost of annual chemical treatments for algae.”

In a previous report from 2011, the Curneal noted that Water Filtration Plant had been able to cut their normal expenses for algae treatment chemicals in half, which Curneal attributed to the introduction of the paddlefish. Whereas the Filtration Plant was then utilizing around \$20,000 of copper sulfate annually to control algae before the paddlefish's debut in Pee Wee, they saw an extraordinary decrease in yearly costs between \$8,000 and \$10,000.

Today, just over a year later, Curneal says the local paddlefish have grown in size and are reducing costs even more. In fact, the larger fish are approaching 15-20 pounds in weight and are measuring at approximately 36 inches in length (including their spoon-like snout). As a result of this increase in size, the annual water treatment costs for are now approximately \$12-14 thousand dollars less.



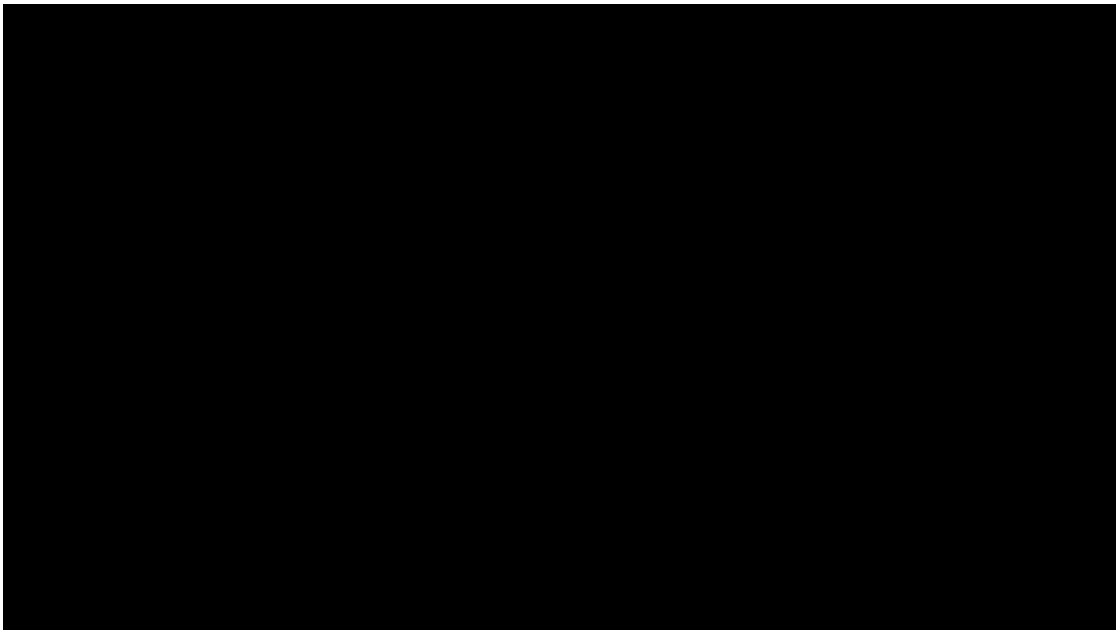
Yet, with dangerously hot and dry weather enveloping our region, are the fish in jeopardy due to low water levels? Fortunately, Curneal says the answer is “No.” In fact, the Water Treatment facility at Pee Wee Lake is pumping in approximately 9 million gallons of water from the 15.7 mile Green River Pipeline each day. As a result, water levels in the lake remain safe for the species. What’s more, Curneal notes that those in Grapevine Lake are safe as well even though the water levels are lower than normal.

As of this report, there have been no negative side effects of the fish being present in the lakes and people are reminded to leave the fish species alone.

“We don’t even notice they’re in there a lot of the time. They haven’t caused any problems and seem to be helping out in a lot of different ways,” said Curneal.

To learn more about the paddlefish and/or spoonbill catfish, which also happens to be that state of Missouri’s official aquatic animal, check out the following link: <http://mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/paddlefish>.

To view a video of the paddlefish/spoonbill catfish courtesy of the North American Fishing Club, click the YouTube player attached below.



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Some information and second photo provided by the [Missouri Department of Conservation](#)  
Video courtesy of the [North American Fishing Club](#)

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