

R E P O R T
Y E L L O W A N D B L A C K W A T E R
R I V E R S

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YELLOW RIVER

The Yellow River heads up about 18 miles north of Opp, Alabama and flows approximately 90 miles southwest, where it empties into East Bay on the Gulf. According to local residents, this stream has produced numerous catches of fish in the past, and at certain times of the year is still considered good fishing.

An excerpt from the Lake and Stream Survey, published by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission in 1961, reveals the following:

"Luckily, there are some watersheds left that haven't felt the effects of man's misuse and have remained much the same as they were many years ago. Proudly, the Yellow River Watershed is an example of such an area. There are definite reasons why it has remained so: First, Eglin Air Force Base has vast tracts of wooded forest which have been cared for and managed well. All through the watershed, proper land use has held erosion to a minimum. Secondly, industrial waste doesn't enter the picture because industry is almost entirely lacking. Third, raw sewage is controlled and treated. All of the above things spell pure water for man's use, whether for drinking or for recreation. We feel that every attempt should be made to insure that these healthy streams will not become open sewers to be scoffed at by future generations.

When fishing in an area doesn't seem to be up to par, the first thought in a fisherman's mind is that it should be stocked so fishing will be better. This however, is not the answer. As in farming, some lands produce more than others because the soil is more fertile and because of the amount and kinds of nutrients and minerals present. Therefore, when the soil is poor, planting more seed will not increase the yield. This, in a way, is the same when it comes to raising a crop of fish. If certain nutrients and minerals are missing in a body of water, the number of fish is limited to the amount

available. Therefore, dumping in thousands of additional fish would not alter the trouble, and these would all be lost with no benefit gained.

Large areas of the river are shallow and contain numerous snags and logs. These cannot only burst a motor, but can puncture or even overturn a boat. So in planning a trip, a small motor and a lot of caution will save time, money, and possibly more."



Shallow water stretch on river

Much of the above is true today, however, land use is changing in the upper parts of the river. More land is being placed in cultivation and additional silt loads are being carried by stream. Flood periods are more severe but are shorter in duration. Rain waters run off more rapidly and flood swamps and marshes for a shorter time, this means that fish do not have an opportunity to spread out over a large feeding area.

Dead-heading operations by loggers and others have allowed once large holes to silt in to where, presently, stretches of up to two miles

are only six inches deep. Physical changes in the river have resulted in a decreased fish population. The remedy for this lies in the creation of deep water holes that provide suitable habitat for game fish to live.



Area silted in on Blackwater River

BLACKWATER RIVER

The upper reaches of the Blackwater River flows through mostly "pine country", and consequently, is clear and cold much of the time. Run off is not nearly as rapid as the Yellow River and periods of high water are present for a longer time following a heavy rain.

At times pollution causes a problem below Highway 90, but for the most part, the river is free of harmful wastes. The main problem with the river is that there is just no place to raise fish for about four to six months of the year. Low water from the Alabama line to about the point where it leaves Blackwater State Forest makes travel by boat impossible.

Samples of the fish population have not been made on either the

Blackwater or Yellow Rivers as rotenone could have caused severe fish kills because of low water. It is impossible to run an electric shocker again because of water depth. Much of the fish life can be inspected by quietly walking the stream bank and observing the few shallow pools.



Few fish can be found in the clear shallow water

In the Fall of 1966, Holt Hatchery raised an abundance of Bluegill and Shellcracker. Some 142,000 of these fish were quietly stocked in Blackwater and Yellow Rivers to see if this method could increase the numbers of fish in these and other rivers. It is significant that this year is probably the worst fishing ever experienced on these rivers.

Only through habitat changes such as: felling trees into the river to create holes, or the construction of dams which are controlled by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission for fish population, can we expect fishing to return to previous levels.