**MINUTES OF MAY 21, 2024 REGULAR MEETING**

**Board of Commissioners of**

**Bayou D’Arbonne Lake Watershed District**

Union Parish Courthouse Annex

303 East Water Street

Farmerville, LA 71241

6:30 p.m.

1. Roll Call – Terry Morris called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Commission members present were Terry Morris, Richard Royal, Ken Myers and Steve Adams. Todd Demoss and Steve Cagle were absent. Bill Carter and Neal DeForest were also present.
2. Invocation/Pledge of Allegiance – Richard Royal led the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. Public Comment Registration – Three people signed up for public comment.

D. Agenda Approval – Motion was made by Richard Royal and seconded by Steve Adams to approve the Agenda with the amendment of adding Item G. 8 for the Barak Shriner’s Tournament and the Pelican Crappie Club Youth Bream Derby Tournament. The motion passed unanimously.

E. Approval of Minutes – Motion was made by Steve Adams and seconded by Ken Myers to approve the minutes of March 2024 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

F. Financial Reports/Budget/Audit:

1. Approve March and April 2024 Bank Account Summary – Motion was made by Richard Royal and seconded by Steve Adams to approve the March and April 2024 Bank Account Summary. The motion passed unanimously.
2. Approve March and April 2024 Bank Statement Reconciliation - Motion was made by Richard Royal and seconded by Steve Adams to approve the March and April 2024 Bank Statement Reconciliation. The motion passed unanimously.
3. Approve March and April 2024 Financial Report – Motion was made by Richard Royal and seconded by Steve Adams to approve the March and April 2024 Financial Report. The motion passed unanimously.

G. Old and New Business:

1. Boat Launch Areas - General Maintenance / Improvements – Richard Royal said that the replacement signs for Ramp Road and Gill's Ferry have been ordered, the materials are in and they are being installed in the next couple of weeks.
2. Boat Launch Fees - Status - Richard Royal said that to date for 2024, $18,497.89 has been collected in daily launch fees and permit sales.
3. Fish Stocking Program – Terry Morris said that American Sport Fish will be restocking 40,000 two-inch fingerling tiger bass in the lake on Tuesday, June 11, 2024, at 7:00 a.m. from Jake's. He said that the media will attend, and the Louisiana Team Trail and any other volunteers are welcome to help distribute the fish. Ryan Daniel, Biologist with the LDWF, said that LDWF will be there to look at the fish to make sure they are healthy and will help to distribute the fish in addition to utilizing all the volunteers.

Richard Royal said that the Commission has wanted to stock the lake for some time but has not been able to do so because of funding and that it is now possible with the collection of launch fees and private donations.

Ryan Daniel said that this is also an effort to add more trophy bass in the lake. He said the more bass with Florida genetics that can be put in the lake, the better the chance you have of producing trophy fish. He indicated that these fish will be larger than the fish that LDWF stocks annually and said that LDWF just finished stocking the lake with about 300,000 smaller bass fingerlings which has been done annually since the 1990s.

Mr. Daniel said the last genetic sample of the bass population in the lake showed 35% of the bass sample had Florida genetics in them. He said that is the highest percentage of the Florida gene seen in the bass population of the lake.

Steve Adams asked about the survival rate of fingerlings based on habitat placement and Mr. Daniel said that it is much better to place them in good cover with plenty of aquatic vegetation so that the fingerlings can hide and grow and not get eaten immediately.

Mr. Daniel was asked if the drawdown will affect the fingerlings and he said it will not have much of an impact. He said the larger fish do not feed heavily during the drawdown and indicated that stocking will take place above the Highway 33 Bridge since that area has a better habitat.

Mr. Daniel was asked about the growth rate of the fingerlings, and he said that in a year the fish would be approximately 8 inches long and 12 inches wide in two years and also indicated that because they are Florida bass, they will have above average growth rates.

Mr. Daniel was asked if there would be any markings to distinguish between the regular bass and the Florida bass and he said no and that the only way to tell is genetic testing.

Mr. Daniel said that a gill net sample was performed over the winter to look at larger bass in the lake that aren't typically collected during standardized electrofishing samples. He said that based on that sample, there were more bass ten pounds and over than has ever been collected in a sample. He said there were several fish over ten pounds, one as big as 13 pounds, and a couple of 12-pound fish. Mr. Daniel attributed the larger fish to the continued Florida bass stockings.

Mr. Daniel said that the winter sampling was the only sampling that has been done in the past year and there is not one scheduled for this year.

1. Lake Drawdown – Terry Morris said that the Drawdown Policy provides that the lake is drawn down every four years beginning the day after Labor Day, and this would be continued until the next cycle. Bill Carter reiterated that the Drawdown Policy provides that the lake is drawn down every four years to five feet below pool stage starting around Labor Day and ending around Thanksgiving. He said that depending on weather, aquatic vegetation, or other factors, LDWF may request that the drawdown be extended. Mr. Carter said that the reason for the drawdown is for homeowners’ maintenance and to allow the Commission to repair ramps and do channeling. He also indicated that the Commission always consults with LDWF, who is responsible for the management of fisheries on the lake, for a recommendation as to whether to continue the drawdown schedule.

Mr. Daniel said that before a decision is made on the drawdown, he does a vegetation survey on the lake to see if there is any need to potentially delay the drawdown or maybe skip a year due to the status of the vegetation on the lake. He indicated that he went back and looked at some of the sites where there was heavy hydrilla coverage last year and he did not see any of that this year, likely due to the high waters this spring. He mentioned that hydrilla is very sensitive to turbid conditions in the lake.

Mr. Daniel said he did see a good bit of emergence and no significant amount of submerged vegetation in the main lake south of Highway 33. He said that based on the vegetation survey, he sees no biological reason to alter the drawdown schedule and recommends staying on schedule for this year.

Mr. Daniel was asked if the drawdown should be extended like the Lake Claiborne drawdown of every six years, with the concern being the number and size of fish being caught from the lake during the drawdown. Mr. Daniel said that the bass population could be better, but LDWF does not attribute that to the drawdowns. He said there is a very large dataset from every drawdown looking at the bass population and only positive results have been the outcome from the drawdowns. He indicated that drawdowns are one of the few management options that benefit the fisheries and there has been no negative impact from the five-foot drawdowns. He also said that if LDWF were to be able to manage lakes strictly for fisheries purposes, they would recommend more frequent, longer duration drawdowns.

Mr. Daniel said that as far as the claims of lots of big bass being taken out of the lake during the drawdowns, LDWF agents are not seeing that. He said that while LDWF has not performed creel surveys at the boat launches during the drawdowns, there is no evidence that occurs. He said that the creel surveys done on normal, non-drawdown years show that only 16% of the bass caught are being kept, and there's less than one bass harvested per fishing trip. He said fishing pressure will be higher during the drawdown than a typical year, even though the drawdown is in September and October, which are normally the lowest fishing pressure months of the year. He said there's typically not a whole lot of people fishing in September and October, but more people do go out and take advantage of the drawdown.

Mr. Daniel was asked why the drawdown was held in September and October. Mr. Daniel said that the drawdown is more effective in controlling vegetation in drier months. Mr. Daniel indicated that this year the LDWF is planning to conduct experimental plantings on the lake bottom with different grasses to provide a good growth of cover for the fish when the lake is refilled. The fish would utilize the grass stands as cover and that could increase the fertility in the lake when those grasses start to break down. He said this has been done on different lakes during drawdown periods and would like to try that on D’Arbonne to see if it is feasible.

Bill Carter asked Mr. Daniel about LDWF enforcement during the drawdown period and Mr. Daniel said he would make a request to have extra enforcement personnel on the lake during that period.

A series of questions about the drawdown policy was answered by Bill Carter, Commission Members and Ryan Daniel.

A motion was made by Steve Adams and seconded by Richard Royal to continue the current drawdown policy of a drawdown to five feet below pool stage beginning the day after Labor Day, September 3, 2024. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Handicap Kayak Launch Ramp Project – Stephanie Herrmann spoke to the Commission about the handicap accessible kayak launch and asked if the Commission would be willing to allow the kayak launch to be placed in a public location controlled by the Commission for public access. She said she spoke with Caleb Seney with MedCamps of Louisiana who specializes in handicap accessible access points, and he suggested Ramp Road on Highway 2 East. Ms. Herrmann indicated she has a few vendors who are willing to work on the project if funding is available through a grant. The logistics of this project was discussed by the Commission members.

A motion was made by Richard Royal and seconded by Ken Myers to approve the Lake Commission’s participation in the handicap accessible kayak launch at Highway 2 East. The motion passed unanimously.

1. Request to Use Ramp Road by Union Parish Chamber of Commerce for Independence Day Fireworks Display – Richard Royal said that the July 4th fireworks show will be on Saturday, July 6, 2022, and the Union Parish Chamber of Commerce is requesting to close Ramp Road from midnight July 5, 2024, to midnight on July 6, 2024. A motion was made by Steve Adams and seconded by Richard Royal to close Ramp Road from midnight July 5, 2024, to midnight on July 6, 2024, and authorize the President of the Lake Commission to enter into an Agreement with the Union Parish Chamber of Commerce. The motion passed unanimously.
2. Reminders: (a) Louisiana Annual Ethics Training (Due December 31), and (b) Annual Financial Disclosure (Due May 15) – Terry Morris reminded everyone about the Ethics training and Financial Disclosure filing.
3. Barak Shriner’s Tournament and the Pelican Crappie Club Youth Bream Derby Tournament – Richard Royal said that on June 15, 2024, the Barak Shriner’s Tournament and the Pelican Crappie Club Youth Bream Derby Tournament will be taking place and they have requested closure of Highway 33 Ramp Road for the tournaments.

A Motion was made by Ken Myers and seconded by Richard Royal to close Highway 33 Ramp Road on June 15, 2024, for the Barak Shriner’s Tournament and the Pelican Crappie Club Youth Bream Derby Tournament. The motion passed unanimously.

H. Public Comment –

Larry Reeves asked if a light could be placed at Hog Pen Landing due to low visibility. He also indicated that people were not paying the fee to launch and asked if there was anything that could be done to ticket these persons.

Kevin Barkley asked if he would be ticketed for trespassing on the Downsville side of the Spillway behind the tainter gates. After discussion, several of the Commission members and Bill Carter stated that any citation for trespassing would not be issued by the Lake Commission but rather from law enforcement.

Mike Brister asked a series of questions including ownership of the lake, the governing body of the lake, and the operation of the tainter gates. The questions were answered by Bill Carter.

1. Adjourn - A motion to adjourn was made by Richard Royal and seconded by Steve Adams. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned.