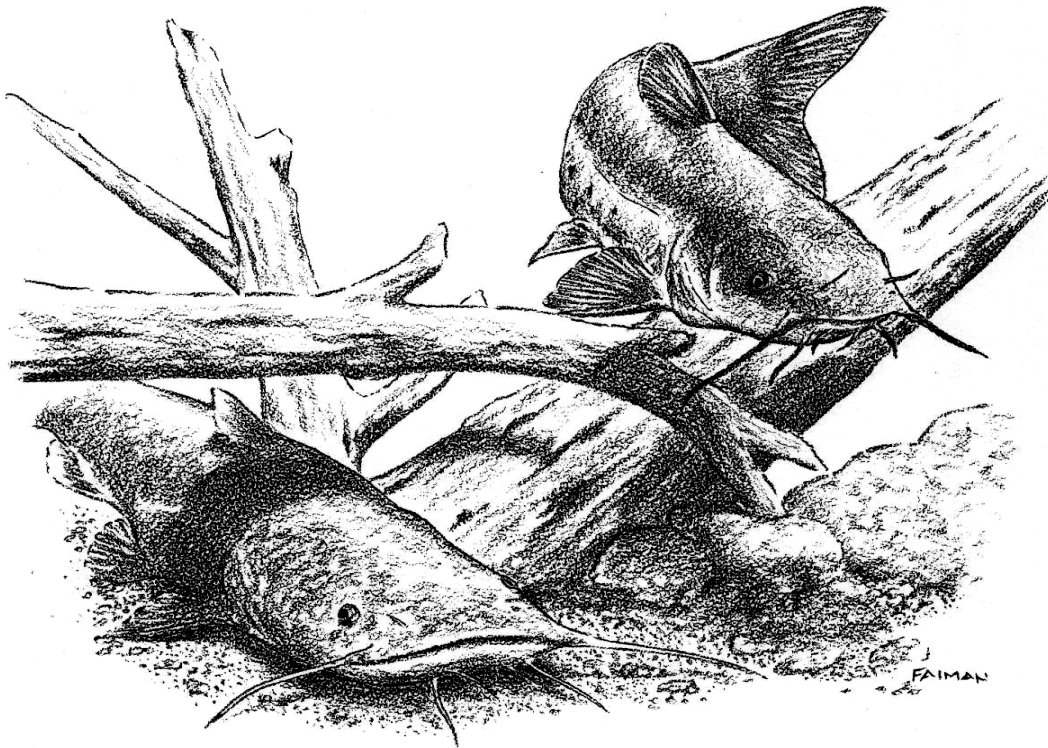




Fishing in a Barrel

A Guide to the Design and Placement of Fish Attractors



How many times have you heard someone say “it was as easy as catching fish in a barrel”? Fishing itself is occasionally that easy, and when it happens it’s often due to the presence of fish attractors.

Fish Attractors

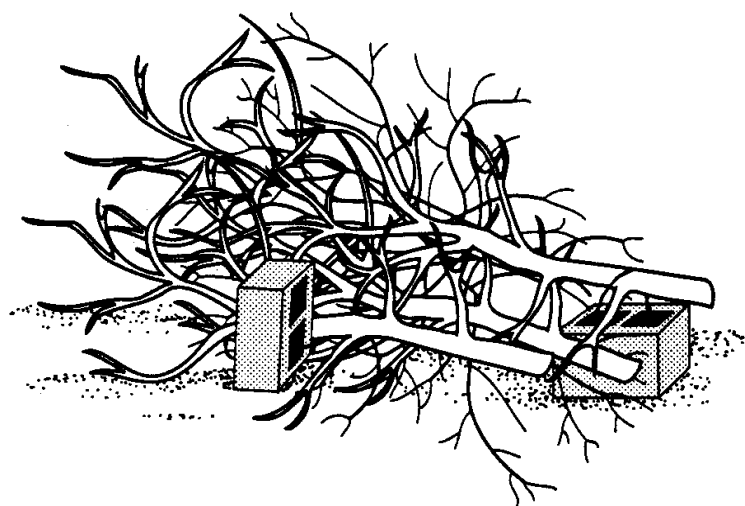
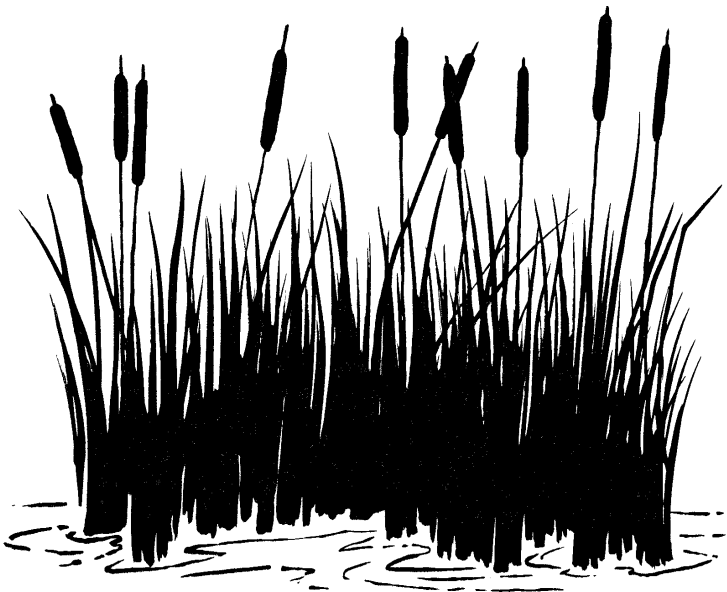
What is a fish attractor? Is it some new type of high tech fishing gadget, a hot new lure or is it a scent guaranteed to drive fish wild? Actually, none of these qualify. Fish attractors are simply elements in or near the water that provide valuable fish habitat. Cover such as man made structures, brush piles, crappie beds and aquatic plants all qualify. These elements attract fish by providing them with shade, spawning areas or places to rest or escape from predators. The best attractors also provide food for fish by creating a home

for larval aquatic insects. Small fish come to the cover to eat the insects and bigger fish station themselves nearby to feed on the smaller fish. Several studies show just how important cover is to fish and, in turn, to anglers. At Barkley Lake in Kentucky, fisheries biologists found that crappie, bass and channel catfish were much more abundant near cover than in open water. A 1981 survey at Missouri’s Long Branch Lake revealed that anglers caught twice as many bass and crappie per hour near cover than in open water. A Virginia study found that largemouth bass spent about 80 percent of their time near the structures we call fish attractors.

Fish attractors occur naturally; for example a bank tree might topple into the water where its branches set up a food chain that eventually includes fish. Fish attractors can also occur inadvertently, as when a landowner

installs a dock in front of his property.

You can usually take matters into your own hands and create your own fish attractors. These will both help increase the carrying capacity of the water and serve as your own private fishing hotspots. Attractors vary in size, complexity and the amount of work necessary to build and maintain them. In most cases, your goal will simply be to provide underwater cover of some sort which will initiate and support a food chain. Cover can be constructed from a variety of materials, such as stakes, logs, concrete blocks, rocks, drain tile, wooden pallets, pipe and prefabricated plastics. Research has shown that natural materials like brush and trees are the most economical and effective attractors.



NATURAL ATTRACTORS

Aquatic Vegetation

Aquatic vegetation is often considered a nuisance and removed by many lake owners. Plants, however, are a natural and necessary component of any healthy pond or lake. They provide cover, food and nesting sites for fish and other aquatic organisms and oxygenate the water and help prevent shoreline erosion. Because aquatic plants are necessary for good fishing, they should be managed rather than eliminated.

A “fish-healthy” pond or lake usually requires that no more than 15 to 20 percent of the bottom or surface be occupied by rooted aquatic plants. If your pond or lake lacks adequate aquatic plants, you might consider establishing them. The Department of Conservation publications “Water Plants for Missouri Ponds” and “Aquatic Briar Patch” contain information on desirable aquatic plants.

Brush/Trees

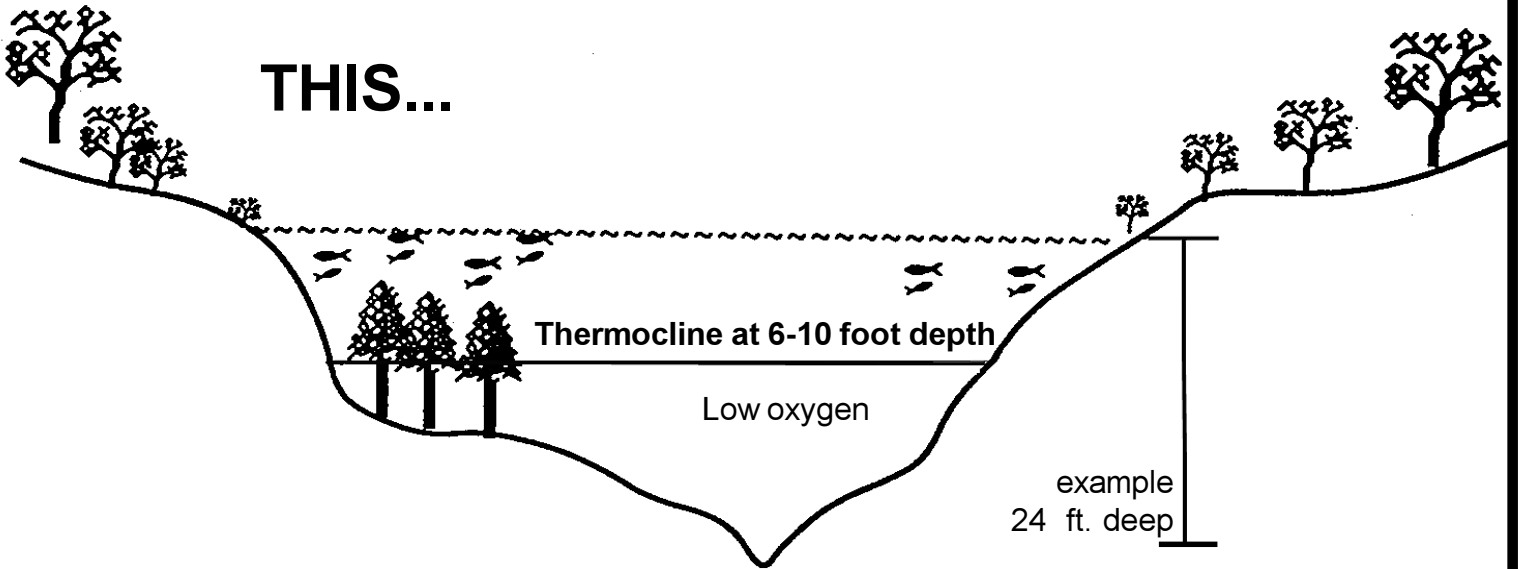
Brush pile materials are usually inexpensive and easily obtained. Almost any type of tree can be used to make attractors, but the best are bushy trees such as osage orange, pin oak, post oak and cedar. Firewood cutting leftovers and Christmas trees are also excellent candidates for brush piles. Trees can be anchored with rocks, concrete blocks or oncrete slabs. Anchors can be tied to the trees using plastic banding, polypropylene rope or Number 9 wire.

The easiest time to install a fish attractor is while the lake is being built. A bulldozer can quickly build several good attractors by pushing downed trees together during construction. These structures can be anchored in place by pushing dirt over their bases or by using cable and earth anchors. Timber left standing in the lake’s basin creates a natural fish attractor.

For existing lakes and ponds, trees can be towed into place with a boat or placed on the ice during winter to sink in position when the ice melts. This latter technique requires thick well established ice. A good rule of thumb is to wait until the ice is 18+ inches thick. The size of your lake or pond and existing habitat will determine how many brush piles to install. A small pond might need only one big brush pile, while larger lakes may require several to noticeably improve the fishing.

BRUSHPILE PLACEMENT IN LAKES AND PONDS

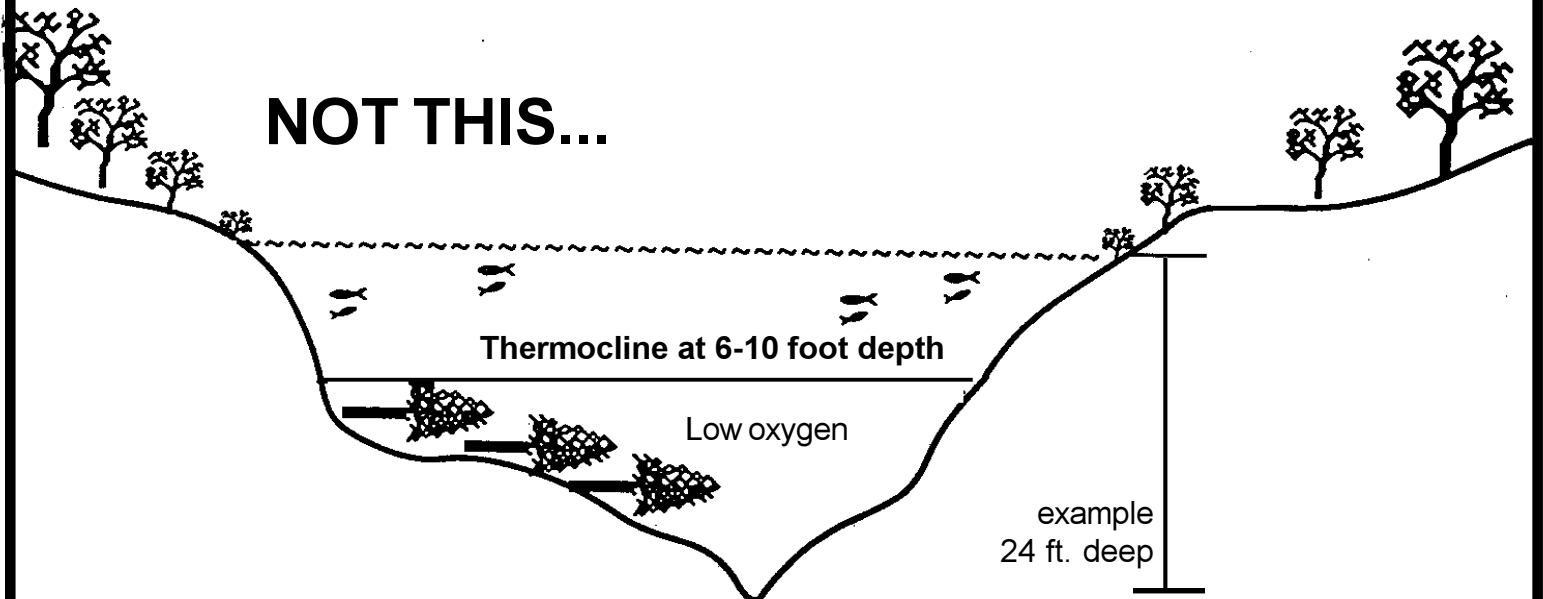
THIS...



IMPORTANT NOTE:

Place brush in a vertical position and in water less than 15 feet deep as shown in the above diagram. By using this method, fish will be able to utilize the brush all year long. Using the method shown below, fish will only be able to utilize the brush during the spring and fall turnover.

NOT THIS...



Fish Attractor Guidelines

Three or four trees can provide adequate cover, but generally the larger the brush pile the better. Good attractors will be about 10 by 15 feet, or larger. Grouping trees to make one large brush pile is more effective than having individual trees spread out over the entire lake.

A good rule of thumb for larger lakes is to place one large brush pile for every 2 to 3 acres of water. Concentrate cover in larger lakes in areas that are most attractive to fish, such as in coves, off points and along the edges of old creek channels and drop-offs. Brush piles in small ponds can be placed around the shoreline or off the dam, as long as you are careful to maintain a safe distance (approximately 100 feet) between the structure and any spillways or overflow pipes. Decaying structure material can do severe damage to these and subsequently the entire impoundment. It's also a good idea to place some brush piles within casting distance of bank anglers.

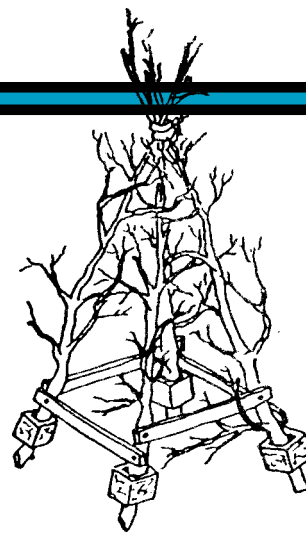
Don't place cover in the deepest water because dissolved oxygen levels during summer may be too low to support fish life. For most small lakes and ponds, place the cover no deeper than 10 to 12 feet. Brush piles won't interfere with boating if sunk 4 to 5 feet below the surface of the water.

Stack tree limbs or stand trees up on the bottom by placing weight only at the butt end of a tree. A higher profile creates more usable fish cover.

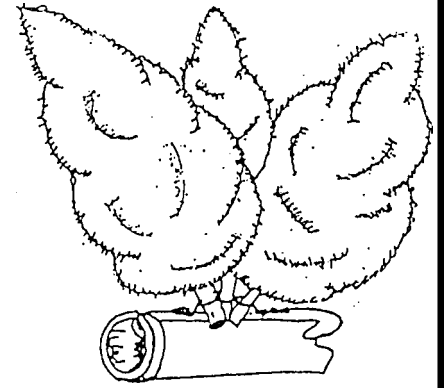
Arranging larger brush piles in an X, T or C shape can help concentrate fish. The top of the T and left side of the C should run parallel to shore. The tail ends of the C and T should extend out into deeper water. Fell live or dead trees around the shoreline using a hinge cut to hold the trees in position. This provides good overhead cover for fish. Place markers on shore or tie markers to the attractors to help you locate them.

Natural cover decomposes and needs periodic replacement. Softwood trees last about 7 years and some hardwoods can remain up to 30 years.

Wear appropriate safety gear such as gloves, protective glasses, and hard-toed shoes when constructing attractors. Be sure to contact the proper authority before adding cover to your favorite lake or pond. Public lakes have special regulations that apply.



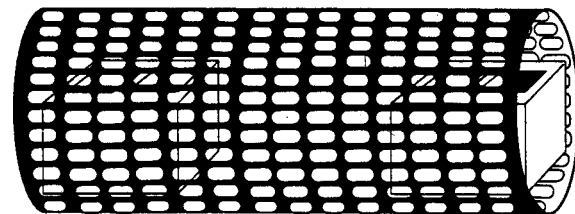
Pyramid structure



Evergreen bundle



Brush bundle



Polypropylene netting structure



Hinge cut tree

For clarification of these regulations or further information about habitat structures contact your fisheries regional office or visit the MDC web-site at www.conservation.state.mo.us.

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