

GASKIN PARK FLATHEAD CATFISH TOURNAMENT

JUNE 24 & 25, 2011

The Employees Club of the City of Wewahitchka hosted the 7th Annual Gaskin Park Flathead Catfish Tournament June 24 and 25, 2011, at Gaskin Park Landing in Wewahitchka, Florida. This Tournament is the second in the Apalachicola Flathead Catfish Tournament Trail series.

The fishing for this tournament usually takes place on the Apalachicola and Chipola Rivers as well as areas of the Dead Lakes. Because of the low water on the Apalach, many anglers had to run down the Chipola River to the convergence of the two rivers and come back up to get to water deep enough for fish on the southern part of the Apalach. There were sections of the river where a person could actually walk from one side to the other. A couple of the fishermen joked about having shovels with them to travel the rivers. Hazards on the rivers abound when it is high and fast or low and dry. Such hazards of a low water table are the many stumps and deadfalls in the rivers and the Dead Lakes as well as sunken boats from the late 1800's including cotton barges, steamboats, and paddle wheelers. The Apalachicola River is connected to part of the toll-free 3,000 mile Intracoastal Waterway which was authorized by Congress in 1919. The Waterway was maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers running from the Apalachee Bay in NW Florida to the Rio Grande in Brownsville, Texas along the Gulf of Mexico coast. The Atlantic Coast section runs from Boston, Massachusetts to Key West, Florida.

The Wayne County Tourism Board (Jesup, Georgia) together with several county officials brought their record flathead catfish (83 pounds and 54 inches long) mounted in a transparent traveling exhibit. It was caught in June 2006 on the Altamaha River demonstrating just how big these catfish can grow. These distinguished visitors were promoting their catfish tournaments for August 2011 and May 2012. They also had a transparent 600 gallon tank for the use of Gaskin Park anglers to show off their catch of the day for the spectators. For more information on the Wayne County tournaments, please visit www.waynetourism.com. Wayne County generously provided a drawing for their May tournament which was awarded to Tripp Barrier of Wewahitchka.

The Florida state record flathead is 49.39 pounds and 42.5 inches long caught in April 2004 on the Apalachicola River according to the Florida Wildlife Commission website at www.myfwc.com. Flathead catfish are non-native to Florida and Georgia migrating here from states west and are

excellent table fare. The Apalachicola Tournament Trail does not release these catfish; if they are not kept by the fishermen, most are donated to fish fry fund raisers for a variety of causes.

This year catfish from the Gaskin Park tournament were donated to Florida baseball's District 4 Champions, the 12 and under Wewa Dixie Youth Boys from Wewahitchka to help them raise funds to travel to East Lakeland, Florida for the state tournament.

In addition to the donation of fish by tournament participants, Richard Keele of Keele's Fishin Shack in Blountstown, FL donated a Tica rod and Tica Cayman 205 reel combo to be auctioned off with the funds going to the baseball team. Bidding started at \$50 for this \$300 value set and finally ended with the highest bid of \$140 by Rudy Sumner of Hosford, Florida.

Tripp Barrier, proprietor of Snow King Snowballs, helped the anglers and spectators cool down with delicious icy treats, donating a portion of his proceeds to the ball team as well.

Tournament stats for the June event include 77 anglers (10 women) in 39 boats, some coming from as far away as Oklahoma and many coming from various areas of Georgia and Florida.

The 112 fish weighed in totaled 1,239.12 pounds and were brought to the scales by 34 men and 5 women out of the 77 total competitors. The tournament lasts 20 hours from 4 pm Friday to noon on Saturday. Only flathead catfish are eligible for this particular tournament and they must be at least fourteen inches and alive when weighed. Entry fees include a door prize ticket and tournament ball cap. Door prizes awarded to the participants were various rods and reels at a total value of around \$700. Every fish weighed in gives the angler another door prize ticket as well as adding to his cumulative Trail total from this season's four tournaments. The individual with the most flathead weight at the end of the Trail wins an additional \$800 prize to go with any other winnings he or she may get along the way. For 2011, the Trail started in Bristol (Liberty County) with the Liberty County Senior Citizens tournament (benefiting that organization) in April then moved on to Gulf County with the Gaskin Park tournament in June (benefiting the Employees Club scholarship fund), Gator Classic in August (benefiting Project Graduation), and ending with the Florida Catfish Classic in September (also benefiting the scholarship fund) as the last of the Trail. For more information on the tournaments, please visit Gulf County's Tourism Council at www.visitGulfCounty.com or the official tournament website www.FloridaCatfishClassic.com or on Facebook with the Employees Club under "City of Wewa". You can even make a simple old fashioned telephone call to 850-639-2605.

Tim Ake of Wewa was first on the leader board with a 16.8 pound flathead catfish just before dark on Friday evening. By 10 pm Tim was knocked into 2nd place by Crystal Hamlin of Bristol, FL with a 28.32 pound flathead. By 8:30 am Saturday morning, Tim was off the board, Crystal was in 4th place and Chris Vinson of Bristol was in 1st place with a 34.61 pound catfish. Scales were open from 4 pm Friday to noon on Saturday, the total length of the tournament. The fisherpersons could weigh in at any time during the night and the board constantly changed until the noon whistle. At that time, the first place holder had to take a lie detector test to become the official winner.

Those official winners are:

1 st	Chris Vinson	Bristol, FL	34.61 pounds	\$1,000
2 nd	Ken Sumner	Bristol, FL	33.20 pounds	\$500
3 rd	Parley Shuler	Bristol, FL	31.85 pounds	\$400
4 th	Jack Foskey	Vidalia, GA	29.30 pounds	\$300
5 th	Crystal Hamlin	Bristol, FL	28.32 pounds	\$200

And the individual with the most flathead pounds for the Gaskin Park Flathead Catfish Tournament was Jamie Lee with 21 fish totaling 177.10 pounds. Individual fish ranged in weight from 2.29 pounds to 18.28 pounds garnering him \$250.