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POPULAR MISSOURI LAKES RECOGNIZED AS WATERS TO WATCH PROJECT FOR 2012

The National Fish Habitat Partnership (www.fishhabitat.org) has unveiled the **2012 10 "Waters to Watch"** list, a collection of rivers, streams, estuaries, watershed systems, shores and lakes that will benefit from strategic conservation efforts to protect, restore or enhance their current condition.

These waters represent a snapshot of this year's larger voluntary habitat conservation efforts in progress. These and other locally driven conservation projects are prioritized and implemented by regional Fish Habitat Partnerships that have formed throughout the country to implement the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. The objective, to conserve freshwater, estuarine and marine habitats essential to the many fish and wildlife species that call these areas home is the foundation of the National Fish Habitat Partnership. In Missouri, Table Rock Lake and Lake Taneycomo have been selected as one of the 10 "Waters to Watch" projects for 2012, through the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership.

Throughout the year, through the work of our partners these projects will be the showcase of conservation efforts working to avoid and reverse persistent declines in our nation's aquatic habitats. Having featured 60 partnership projects since 2007, the monitoring of these projects proves that partner efforts and strategies do make a difference.

Table Rock Lake and Lake Taneycomo are located in the White River Hills region of the Ozark Plateau along the Missouri-Arkansas border. At conservation pool, Table Rock Lake encompasses 43,100 acres with 745 miles of shoreline, and Lake Taneycomo covers just over 2,000 acres. Table Rock Lake is the second largest of five reservoirs in the upper White River drainage basin which covers over 5,000 square miles in both Missouri and Arkansas. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimates the recreational use of the lake at between 40 and 50 million visitor visits annually with the economic value of the fishery estimated at \$41 million (1997 estimate). Along with the Branson tourism industry, Table Rock and the other White River impoundments are responsible for hundreds of millions of dollars pumped into the local economies.

This high-profile recreational development has come with an environmental cost. The large number of

visitors, as well as increases in confined animal production spaces in the watershed and population growth, has created water quality issues in Table Rock Lake. According to USGS, water clarity at Table Rock Dam decreased by more than 2.5 feet from 1974 to 1994. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) identified municipal sewage discharges, residential wastewater treatment systems and livestock and poultry wastes as the likely causes of nutrient loading. In response to declining water quality issues, the Table Rock Lake Area Chamber of Commerce formed Table Rock Lake Water Quality (TRLWQ), a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, in 1998. TRLWQ is focusing its efforts on failing onsite wastewater treatment systems and other decentralized wastewater treatment systems in the watershed. Estimates are that 75 to 90% of existing systems over 5 years old are failing. MDC has pledged full support of TRLWQ's water quality improvement programs.

TRLWQ received \$2 million in federal funding and along with \$667,000 in local match funded a demonstration project to determine which advanced wastewater treatment systems were best suited for local conditions, along with installation and on-site testing. The project also tested the feasibility of a Responsible Management Entity (RME) to own, operate and maintain the wastewater treatment system so property owners had only to pay a monthly maintenance fee. TRLWQ identified Ozarks Clean Water Company as the RME and expects active service connections to number in the thousands.

Lack of structural habitat in Table Rock Lake was identified by MDC as a limiting factor of fish community stability. The Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership's reservoir habitat assessment has also identified "lack of structure" as a major impairment of reservoirs in this region. In 2007, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), in cooperation with Bass Pro Shops, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission (AGFC), began working on a five-year project to maintain and enhance the fish habitat in Table Rock Lake and Lake Taneycomo. This project is part of the NFWF's National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI) and More Fish Campaign and is designed to be a pilot project in a broader national program focusing on habitat restoration within reservoirs. A total of \$4.5 million was earmarked to spend on the 5-year project.

Between October 2007 and September 2011, 1,650 fish habitat structures were installed in Table Rock Lake, including 1,460 brush structures, 104 rock piles, 49 stump fields, 11 rock/stump combination piles and 26 shallow water rock fence structures. Structure locations are recorded by GPS and are available to the public on the MDC website. In addition to the structural habitat portion of the project, eight cost-share projects for erosion control and sediment reduction in the Table Rock Lake watershed were initiated.

Habitat improvements to the upper portion of Lake Taneycomo began in November 2011 and will include large rock structures designed to increase holding areas for trout and other fish, as well as increase locations for anglers to fish. Project publicity has been a success, with the cooperation of our various partners and other media outlets and businesses.

Evaluation and monitoring of the fish habitat structures began in 2010. Four evaluation techniques are utilized, three of which are underway: electrofishing surveys of habitat treated coves, SCUBA observations of selected habitat structures and radio-telemetry tracking of largemouth bass in the Kings River Arm. The fourth evaluation technique, an angler creel survey, is set to begin in 2012.

The Table Rock Lake NFHI project builds upon a long-standing public/private partnership in southwest Missouri to improve and restore fish habitat in Table Rock Lake, Lake Taneycomo and their watersheds through cover augmentation, watershed management and other water quality-related projects. This

project has proven to be an excellent opportunity to proactively maintain and enhance fish habitat in and around two of the Midwest's most popular sport fisheries and is providing a national example for sustaining and improving reservoir sportfish populations through large-scale habitat improvements.

“Large-scale reservoir habitat restoration efforts are larger and more costly than any one agency, state or federal, can undertake on its own.” said Jeff Boxrucker, Coordinator for the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership, “Partnerships among agencies, local communities, and resource users are vital to addressing these issues, not only to sustain high quality recreational opportunities but to maintain the quality and quantity of water needed by consumptive users.”

Since 2006 The National Fish Habitat Partnership has been a partner in 342 projects in 45 states benefiting fish habitat. “Our approach—teaming local, state, tribal, and federal agencies with private partners and stakeholders is the most strategic way we can make a difference in benefiting fish habitats,” said Kelly Hepler, Chairman of the National Fish Habitat Board. “By watching these 10 models of our nation’s aquatic conservation efforts underway, we can see real progress. Too often we have focused on treatment of symptoms with limited success. Through sound science and on-the-ground locally driven partnerships, these select Action Plan projects can be held high as a vision of what quality habitat should and can be, and how it benefits all people throughout the United States.”

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan is built on a framework of National Fish Habitat Partnerships. These regional-scale efforts include, **the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, the Western Native Trout Initiative, the Driftless Area Restoration Effort, the Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership, the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership, the Desert Fish Habitat Partnership, the Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership, the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership, the Fishers and Farmers Partnership, the Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership, the Great Plains Fish Habitat Partnership, the Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership, the California Fish Passage Forum, the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership, the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership and the Pacific Marine and Estuarine Partnership.** There are also four “Candidate” Fish Habitat Partnerships that have stated their intent to apply for full NFHAP Board recognition.

About the National Fish Habitat Partnership:

The National Fish Habitat Partnership works to conserve fish habitat nationwide, leveraging federal, state, and private funding sources to achieve the greatest impact on fish populations through priority conservation projects. The national partnership implements the National Fish Habitat Action Plan and supports 18 regional grassroots partner organizations.

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