

GCSA FACT SHEET
TULSA WORLD ARTICLES ON JUNE 2013 FISH KILL IN SALT FORK OF THE ARKANSAS RIVER
Prepared by INCOG, June 2013

INCOG NOTE TO GCSA MEMBERS: The following two Tulsa World articles relate to an early June fish kill on the Salt Fork tributary of the Arkansas River west of Ponca City. As of this Fact Sheet preparation (June 24th) the cause(s) of the fish kill have not been determined. Possible causes being investigated are low dissolved oxygen, heavy metals, and high salt concentrations. Due to the prolonged drought in western Oklahoma, normally salty soils and salt deposits may have contributed excessive amounts of salt in recent rainfall runoff, but testing has not been concluded to verify this possible cause. INCOG received permission from Tulsa World to copy the text of these two articles for distribution to its GCSA members for non-commercial, education purposes only.

Tulsa World

'Catastrophic' fish kill along Arkansas River investigated

By KELLY BOSTIAN World Outdoors Writer on Jun 21, 2013, at 2:26 AM Updated on 6/21/13 at 3:08 PM

http://www.tulsaworld.com/article.aspx/Catastrophic_fish_kill_along_Arkansas_River_investigated/20130621_11_A8_Statew224649?subj=1



State wildlife and environmental officials are investigating a die-off of thousands of fish in the Salt Fork of the Arkansas River in north-central Oklahoma.

Kills were reported on June 4 and again on Monday. The die-off has spread downstream roughly 50 river miles from the initial report near Lamont to its confluence with the main channel of the Arkansas River, which is about seven miles south of Ponca City, according to Kay

County Game Warden Spencer Grace, who is investigating the kill.

There is no official estimate of the number of fish killed.

"We're looking at stretches of the river, about a mile at a time, 100 or 200 in this stretch, 50 in the next stretch. You take 100 fish times 50 miles of river, that's a lot of fish," he said.

Both Department of Wildlife Conservation and state Department of Environmental Quality officials have been to the river and taken water samples and fish samples, he said.

Grace would not speculate on the cause of the kill but said it is widespread and "catastrophic."

"I've been working on this the last three days with DEQ and it's been frustrating because so many miles of the river are dead now. There are no fish in the water, no gar, nothing. You only see the occasional turtle. You're not seeing any indicators of new fish dying so we just have to rely on the water tests now."

DEQ spokeswoman Erin Hatfield said water tests would look for a wide range of substances looked for in any fish kill, including heavy metals.

Results will be known in 10 days to two weeks, she said.

There is no official warning to prevent people from going into the water or eating fish from the river, but Grace said he would not recommend it.

Grace said the kill has hit largest fish the hardest.

"I think the smallest one I saw was about three pounds," he said.

"It's killing all aquatic life with the exception of turtles, freshwater mussels and clams. It seems to target species that live on the bottom and the big fish that hang out in those deep holes, so the catfish, buffalo, carp, some paddlefish. It is killing out fish in that system that won't be replaced in our lifetime."

The Salt Fork, which forms the Great Salt Plains Lake where it is dammed in Alfalfa County, has natural salinity but levels measured this week are "astronomical," Grace said.

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Original Print Headline: 'Catastrophic' fish kill investigated

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Tulsa World

Fish kill investigated on Salt Fork of Arkansas River

By KELLY BOSTIAN Outdoors Writer on Jun 20, 2013, at 1:08 PM *Updated on 6/20 at 1:08 PM*

http://www.tulsaworld.com/blogs/post.aspx/Fish_kill_investigated_on_Salt_Fork_of_Arkansas_River/20855

A fish kill involving hundreds of large catfish, carp and some paddlefish on the Salt Fork of the Arkansas River west of Ponca City is under investigation.

Wildlife technician Nathan Copeland with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation in Ponca City said he went to the site with a game warden and a representative of the Department of Environmental Quality on Monday.

“We did (dissolved oxygen) tests and took water samples and collected some fish that had recently died for tests,” he said.

Anglers at the river reported the kill to local game wardens, he said. “We had some anglers out fishing on the river and they started noticing dead fish floating past them, that’s never a good sign, so they called a warden.”

The majority of fish killed were adult fish, Copeland said. They found no small or young fish.

Oxygen tests along on the river showed good levels but the river was flowing well from a recent rain, Copeland said. “All I can say is the DO on Monday was fine, we can’t look into the past or into the future,” he said. “We really won’t know much until tests come back.”

The Department of Environmental Quality will examine water samples and the fish samples were sent to Oklahoma State University at Stillwater for testing, he said.

The Salt Fork rises in Comanche County in Kansas and flows southeasterly to Alfalfa County where a dam on the river creates the Great Salt Plains Lake, which is at the heart of the Great Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge. The Salt Fork merges with the Arkansas River about 7 miles south of Ponca City.

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