

FREE STATE REPORT:

My enquiries have led me to believe that the flyfishing scene in the province is none too positive. The financial slump, internal politics, pollution and the logistical distances seem to have taken their toll in the area.

Middle Vaal Area:

Most people I spoke to see this area in the initial phase of being written off as a premier angling area. Numbers of anglers seem to have dropped, when compared with the previous 5 years. One of the reasons being the high level of pollution of the Vaal originating from Gauteng, Parys and to lesser extent Sasolburg. Bad flow management is also to blame, as the flows were too high during winter and too low during summer.

OVRycma (Orange Vaal River Yellowfish Conservation Management Association) has started up again, but the absence of Pierre de Villiers is felt, as many of the major role players being absent at the last meeting held at Sandveld Nature Reserve. The original philosophy of the association was the mutual working between government agencies, the landowners and fishermen. I cannot but feel with the last meeting held that Free State Conservation has taken it upon itself to be the main force in the "new" association. Only time will tell if this is a good or a bad decision. Plans for a new logo, new views, and re-registration are under way.

Upper Vaal Area:

No negative reports, except illegal netting.

Lower Vaal Area:

This is an area of concern for the future, as the Middle Vaal is becoming more polluted, the emphasis should fall on the Lower Vaal for protection. Since 2010, the NCYWG (Northern Cape Yellowfish Working Group), the main flyfishing and conservation association in this area has declined, This all started when Carl Nel, their web administrator left for Gauteng. Due to the long distances between anglers, the internet was the easiest and most effective method of keeping the association running and keeping communication channels up to date. Except for the previous Bells held at Nkolo Spa, there has been little or no action or communication taking place between the members and those outside the association. It appears that Ettienne Benade is the last person keeping some organization running. Reports are good in the area, with clean, good visibility in the Vaal and also good to average catches being made.

Middle Orange/ Gariep:

No negative reports have been made from this area, and fishing and the environment looks good.

Central Free State Area:

This area is also showing good signs, as it seems the Bloemfontein Flyfishing Club is still slowly growing, with 50 members on their books. The fishing in "spruite" just within the city limits is positive with lots of juvenile (250gram-1kg) large and smallmouth yellows being caught. The club is also busy with a project to tag yellows being caught in the Soetdoring Nature reserve in the Modder river and Krugersdrift dam just outside Bloemfontein. Good catches are also being made in the Kalkfontein dam and Knelpoort dam. Lillydale has also had positive reports on the Riet River after floods cleared the pollution and grass in the river.

Eastern Free State:

This area has the most hope but also the most problems.

After speaking to Dave Weaver and Andre Burger, the following came to my attention. That Sterkfontein dam is being overfished, as more people who once fished the middle Vaal have now moved their attention to this piece of water. Guiding shows that fish are becoming more difficult to catch due to pressure. Other problems seem to be the legal netting that also happens in the dam. (not sure about this one). Bass and Carp numbers are on the increase, and last year the first Bass tournament was held on the dam. It is a fishery under threat. Andre Burger also told me that the number of people interested in flyfishing is dropping fast, as his store's numbers are showing more people are moving to bass, artlure and drop shot style fishing.

As you all know, the Wilge is a hotbed, in the Frankfort area with illegal netting, but it seems steps are now being taken by Free State Conservation, how effective, time will only tell.

Stocking permits are still not sorted out and Werner Boeing has not come back to Clarens Flyfishing Club on the pricing and how the permits will work for trout. No negative reports were received from Maluti Flyfishing Club in Harrismith.

As can be seen, the Free State area is somewhat worse off than in previous years, and only time will tell if Conservation, landowners, Associations and anglers can move aside their petty differences and save what is to save, or before it is too late.

Dirk Human