

Summary of Catahoula Poll Results – Feb. 19-25, 2025

Louisiana Wildlife Federation conducted an informal poll with the following introduction:

Do you have an opinion about the current status of Catahoula Lake's habitat and recreational use? LWF wants to hear it! Please take our informal poll.

In 2020, the Louisiana Supreme Court upheld a trial court's decision in the case *Crooks v. State of Louisiana* that Catahoula Lake is not a lake but instead a river under Louisiana law. As a river under Louisiana law, the vast majority of waterbody is privately owned "riverbank" between the ordinary high and ordinary low water marks. In this way, a public lake of about 23,000 acres was largely privatized and many of the elements of public management have been put on hold or lost while various new landowners, both private and public, assert their new property boundaries.

Do you have an opinion or knowledge about Catahoula Lake and want to share it? If Yes, please continue with this poll. If No, thank you for your interest in wildlife and enjoying the outdoors.

Overview

- The poll ran from Wednesday, February 19, 2025 through Tuesday, February, 25, 2025.
- The poll was sent to 10,937 members and 120 interested parties.
- We received 257 responses from 22 parishes, Wilkinson County, MS, and several out of state landowners, including:
 - 96 responses from Rapides
 - 43 responses from LaSalle
 - 10 responses from Catahoula
 - 12 responses from Grant
 - 6 responses from Avoyelles
- Age of respondents
 - Under 18 – 2 (0.8%)
 - 18-39 – 81 (32.1%)
 - 40-65 – 88 (34.7%)
 - Over 65 – 82 (32.4%)

Question Results

1. **What is your assessment of wildlife habitat for waterfowl, migratory birds, and fish in the Catahoula Lake area over the last five years?**
 - a. It has gotten better – 8 (3.1%)

- b. It Has gotten worse – 207 (80.9%)
 - c. It has remained about the same – 14 (5.5%)
 - d. I'm not sure – 27 (10.5%)
- 2. **What is your assessment of recreational access for public hunting, fishing, and birding in the Catahoula Lake area over the last five years?**
 - a. It has gotten better – 14 (5.4%)
 - b. It Has gotten worse – 195 (75.9%)
 - c. It has remained about the same – 32 (12.5%)
 - d. I'm not sure – 16 (6.2%)
- 3. **Do you support re-establishing a refuge (rest area) for waterfowl?**
 - a. Yes – 218 (84.9%)
 - b. No – 24 (9.3%)
 - c. I'm not sure – 15 (5.8%)
- 4. **Two adjacent landowners are the State of Louisiana managing Dewey Wills WMA and US Fish & Wildlife Service managing Catahoula Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Do you approve of the new expanded boundaries of the Dewey Wills WMA?**
 - a. Yes – 148 (57.3%)
 - b. No – 89 (34.2%)
 - c. I'm not sure – 22 (8.5%)
- 5. **Do you approve of the US Fish & Wildlife Service asserting their expanded boundaries as soon as possible?**
 - a. Yes – 157 (61.1%)
 - b. No – 69 (26.6%)
 - c. I'm not sure – 32 (12.3%)
- 6. **In order to expand public access and coordinate habitat management for wildlife at Catahoula Lake as was enjoyed previously when it was managed as a public water body, would you support any of the following actions taken by the state or federal government (Choose all that apply):**
 - a. Public Funds Used for Acquisition or Management – 70 (27.2%)
 - b. Land Acquisition from Willing Sellers – 58 (22.6%)
 - c. Enter into Conservation Easements or agreements – 58 (22.6%)
 - d. Use of Eminent Domain – 45 (17.5%)
 - e. All of the Above – 132 (51.4%)

f. None of the Above – 39 (15.2%)

7. If you are a local resident or regular visitor to Catahoula Lake, what have you observed about the current condition of Catahoula Lake and want to comment about (Short Answer)

- a. How could the LDWF throw away a reserve on the south end of the lake that was donated many years ago by a family to remain a refuge for ever. The so called land owners (land grabbers) remind me of the when the old west was settled. The first ones to claim and place their survey stakes becomes the owner. Berry and Crooks are prime examples of the bullying that is going on on the beautiful Catahoula Lake. The renaming of this beautiful paradise by some judge that had never set foot on this place is absurd.
- b. There's not enough of fresh water entering from the north end of the lake . The vegetation growth has encroached on the open area of the lake. Certain aquatic vegetation has become a nuisance to the food availability for waterfowl. Oil pipes or placed directly on the bottom of the lake and are leaking petroleum into the water.
- c. The boundaries and not fair and the "land owners" are claiming they already own it.
- d. No refuge, no ducks!
- e. Water level is so inconsistent and has a major role on duck hunting
- f. If we continue to loose public access to places our kids won't get to experience the greatness of the outdoors!
- g. The duck population here has gotten worse year after year. In the last 2 years without having the refuge in place, ducks found out there is no place to feed or rest. Hardly any ducks stay here anymore. Just passing through. I've been hunting here since 1980. Haven't seen it worse. Hunters spend millions of dollars here, but nothing to show for it. Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl spend lots farther north and in Canada ,yet the population is declining.
- h. Catahoula has been ruined by the modified exhausts, constant boats running, people setting up within 300 yards of another party, no rest area for ducks, & the lake needs to be non accessible after 12pm, also guiding should be illegal on public land.
- i. Needs to be managed to get the best habitat for the lake
- j. Too much pressure all day

- k.** Not the sportsman paradise it once was
- l.** I've been hunting Catahoula lake for over 50 years started with my father use to be Duck paradise especially for Pintails and Mallards and all types of puddle ducks the ducks had the refuge to rest in when season opened and it would be stacked with puddle ducks during the season now they have no place to settle down and rest. Bottom line the refuge would hold 300000-5000000 ducks now it's nothing but open and blinds where ducks use to rest and bunch up. Really So sad for the ducks. Duck hunting is pitiful out there now only diving ducks. Please try to get the refuge back for the ducks!
- m.** Catahoula Lake is not the habiatat it once was. Woody vegetation growth has reduced the natural open areas of the lake and prevents growth of natural grasses like chufa grass. The lawsuit granting ownership is an insult to the sportsman who have hunted and fished the lake for generations. The judge who ruled on the case was biased.
- n.** Not having a large refuge for waterfowl to stay will hurt all hunters in Louisiana. Waterfowl will not stop anymore. What has been done to the lake affects all of Louisiana.
- o.** Full public access needs to be restored. Outlaw permanent blinds on the entire lake. Stop all hunting and scouting after 2 p.m.
- p.** its stinks.
- q.** My family has hunted, fished and foraged this area for well over one hundred and 50 years. The current condition of this lake does not even closely resemble what it was 50 years ago. Under the mangement of the LDWF, the Lake has lost better than 40% of its available food production due to woody encroachment. Sedimentation has altered the drainage in such a way that it cannot be drained to maximize moist soil food production for waterfowl.
- r.** Woody vegetation taking over
- s.** The wooded encroachment is steadily spreading and moist soil habitat is depleting.
- t.** Serious decline in ducks and ate a lot of boat traffic
- u.** When the water gets high and kills all of the food the ducks aren't coming there to feed they are roosting from right after shooting light until the break of daylight and they are getting up and flying outta there.

- v.** Guide services and mid motors are the problem. Guide services think they own the lake which is "public". No boundaries for private owned or leased property.
- w.** Ducks can't rest anywer
- x.** Lack of a refuge and over abundance of surface drive motors has contributed to the lake's decline.
- y.** People claiming land that is a lake
- z.** It's in good condition and it should be left alone no wma or private land
- aa.** This needs to be fixed right awayCatahoula lake has been considered a lake since 1806 when it was documented as lake Catahoula to president Jefferson. It was a navigable Waterway then and still is no matter what a paid off judge rules about it. Our lake has been stolen by money hungry, dirty louisiana politics. This cant morally stand
- bb.** Woodie vegetation is taking over the lake and eliminating areas where aquatic vegetation used to grow reducing the amount of feed that used to grow also commercial hunting is taking over and limiting the available area that other hunters have to use and increasing pressure on the ducks .
- cc.** Needs to go back the way it was. More chaos and confusion.
- dd.** Lake needs to go back how it was
- ee.** Cannot hunt without being threatened or property destroyed, even before this land debacle. I hope the Feds take over the whole place and turn it into a refuge to better serve to duck population in central Louisiana
- ff.** Catahoula was a wonderful place for hunting, fishing and recreation until it change to private land and letting people from everywhere in the United States come here to hunt while the local people tried to abide by the rules and laws. Lots of locals have no place to hunt because of the hunting pressure from outside people. There is only room for so many people to hunt the Lake whether it is private or public. The Loud surface drive motor has ruined the hunting on Catahoula alone with people who has NO respect for others. People work hard to have a place to hunt and someone who is to lazy to pull their pants up can get in a blind that has been brushed and decoyed by a hard working person and have someone put in jail for wanting to hunt in his own blind spot. Terrible people with no respect
- gg.** Enjoyed recreational activities on Catahoula since I was a small child to present day. All recreation activities have progressively gotten worse with each year that

passes. For my children's benefit, I would like to see all activities restored so they can experience this state treasure that I was able to enjoy.

hh. The lake definitely needs the reserve back in the middle of the lake definitely hurt a lot of birds from having a spot to rest big decrease in birds seen daily on the lake

ii. Need the refuge back

jj. The commercialization of the lake with too many guide services The duck numbers going down and the private vs federal land mess making it impossible to hunt and enjoy yourself.

kk. Need to clear out the trees.

ll. This waterbody is too important to disregard and do away with the historical management practices that have been in effect for quite a while!

mm. Its a shell of what it once was because of guide services and greed. Guiding should be banned and the lake returned to what it once was

nn. A muffler regulation on boats entering or exiting the lake. The boat ramps need to be updated.

oo. It's the same as everywhere in Louisiana, the state government is allowing so called land owner's to claim public waters and use the crooked police and Louisiana courts to enforce their illegal activities, it's destroying the quality of life for people in Louisiana who love to fish. It's an illegal show of the great amount of corruption in Louisiana courts and all government.

pp. The water elm encroachment has continued to expand into the lake bed and is reducing the quality of the waterfowl habitat. This large scale issue can only be combated by state and federal entities who have the interest and funds to manage the lake as a whole.

qq. Should be returned to a status of "public use". Has been that way for many years. Shouldn't change now

rr. Trees are growing up, state needs to clear all brush before there is no more open water

ss. I've been on Catahoula Lake personally for 30 years, following my dad and grandfather. I also served on the Catahoula Lake Conservation Club board for many years. The hunters actually care about the lake. They want a safe place near home good hunting and fishing for their family. We need to get back to water level management which helps create food and habitat for waterfowl, fish, etc.

tt. Loud shallow drive motors and people with no respect for others have ruined the Lake!!

uu. I believe the current situation of Catahoula lake and private land owners is completely asinine. Duck numbers have dropped off tremendously. I feel this stems from no refuge and hunters having access to the lake sunrise to sunset. I believe regulating hunting hours would improve the lake tremendously.

vv. Less and less ducks every year

ww. I don't understand how federally funded structures like the weir at the intersection of US hwy 84 and 28 and the Diversion Canal can be used to annually flood private land with no access to the public for hunting or fishing

xx. We should be ashamed of what happened to the lake. It went from the largest natural duck habitat lake in North America to a mere shell of what it should be

yy. Live local resident . Enjoyed Catahoula Lake for 40 years .

zz. It's a fight waiting to happen. It needs to be better controlled

aaa. Regardless if it partially goes private or if it goes public it needs to be resolved ASAP. From a law enforcement standpoint our hands are tied in many circumstances.

bbb. It's not like it used to be!!

ccc. I'm confused about how it will be managed as a lake again

ddd. Water elms encroaching the lake bed is taking over areas of the lake

eee. Harrasment from locals, decline in outsider hunting opportunities, decline in ease of access

fff. My observation of Catahoula Lake has been disappointing. It has been handled to fullest legal extent and has only pleased a small amount of elect hunters while the majority of the lake have to suffer for small amounts scraps that LDWF has given permission to hunt . The entire made up survey was surveyed incorrectly and should be re surveyed and Catahoula Lake should be given back to the public. I am in favor of the no blinds so I hope if it did go back to that there there would be restrictions on it to help out with the Waterfowl.

ggg. WATER IS TOO LOW

hhh. Very disappointed that a body of water with a public control structure doesn't have public access.

iii. There is too many people on the wma and it is way too crowded during duck season. I believe it needs to be expanded

jjj. The refuge needs to be re-established immediately it is severely important to wintering waterfowl.

kkk. It has gotten really bad over the last 20 years. It's truly sad that the state of Louisiana would let what's been going on happen to what was once one of the best waterfowl hunting areas in North America. Truly sad that greed and laziness let this happen.

III. The property is not a lake! Have you not been paying attention? When the boundary lines are approved by the court the individual land owners will have the right to do what they want to do with their own property. This is no longer available for public use!

mmm. Waterfowl have no where to rest

nnn. I visit Catahoula Lake at least twice a year to look for birds and butterflies. I hope that it continues to have public access rather than have houses built around the lake limiting access. Cross Lake in Shreveport has very little access.

ooo. All of the people that used to hunt the lake are now all congested into the small portion that is Dewey wells and makes it hard to safely hunt due to not being able to get spaced away from other hunters.

ppp. No refuge =no ducks

qqq. Don't know where nothing is boundaries private or public and neither does the land owner or wildlife and fisheries

rrr. Trees need to be cut for more grass to grow. Especially all of the worthless elm trees on the edges. Those areas are useless

sss. The state has really let the public down on this whole situation, they just basically gave away the land that was given to them at time of statehood in 1812. The state of Louisiana did not own a single acre of land at time of statehood, EXCEPT all of water water bottoms within the state. Which includes Catahoula Lake. But we have all seen it happen, something that should have never been allowed to happen. The ONLY way this could and did happen, is the state not having an expert witness Professional Land Surveyor through this case. I can guarantee you

that if the state would have hired the expert witness Professional Land Surveyor that the Crooks' hired from the get go, this would have never happened. But guess what, the state never realized that they needed one to inform them and fight for them. It was only in early 2019 that the NSPS or LAPELS board really even knew anything about the case and what was happening. The National Society of Professional Surveyors were notified this was happening in January 2019, just 2 weeks before the final Supreme Court ruling to try and defend the Public Land Survey System that is used throughout most of the United States. This was not enough time to get all the details and documents together and analyze them. BUT they did put together a slide show, and stated that this decision is wrong and should not be accepted by the supreme court. Stating "The Public Land Survey System ("PLSS") was designed to eliminate confusion regarding title and land locations. The district court and Third Circuit based their decision on evidence which ignores the historic GLO plats that are the very foundation of a land ownership in the United States." Which was how the General Land Office surveyors surveyed the lake, by establishing township, ranges and sections around the lake, meander lines along the high water mark. Which are supposed to be held and WITHOUT ERROR. So now that the courts have ruled the lake as a navigable river "little river" running through what was called the lake and exiting at french fork, we now have a low water mark (24.08') and a high water mark (36'). By Louisiana law, the land in between is the banks of the river. If it is a lake, the boundaries are to the high water mark (36') and the original meander lines ran by the General Land Office surveyors at the time of first creation. So NOW here is the next big mess all of wrong doing is creating. Let's not forget our Louisiana Laws then regarding "Private things subject to public use" and "Banks of navigable rivers or streams". Louisiana Civil Code, Article 456, states: "The banks of navigable rivers or streams are private things that are subject to public use. The banks of a navigable river or stream is the land lying between the ordinary low and the ordinary high stage of the water. Nevertheless, when there is a levee in proximity to the water, established according to law, the levee shall form the bank." Louisiana Civil Code, Article 455, states: "Private things may be subject to public use in accordance with law or by dedication". So guess what we have now. A River that is very narrow within what was known as the lake, with really long banks. We are talking possibly a mile or more of a bank now in some places. Remember what use to be known as the edge of the lake or "the start other people's property" along the lake, well that is now the end of these long banks and the high water mark. Which by Louisiana Law and definition are the banks of Little River and are now privately owned, BUT subject to public use. So I find it very hard to believe trespassing laws can be upheld in the courts in the areas NOW known as the banks of the river. But hey, maybe nobody has thought about that one, just like not thinking about hiring an expert witness to fight for the State and what's right. I was born and raised in LaSalle Parish, been hunting this lake all my life. I've said for years, this could never happen. That catahoula lake has been a lake since the very beginning, no way judges would go against the very foundations the State of Louisiana was created on and most all other states. That

for sure, they had the best expert witness money could buy. But boy was I wrong, they never even knew they needed it.

ttt. salt water encroachment, LNG expansion and environmental degradation, the death of Cameron, Holly Beach, Hackberry, etc.

uuu. I'd like to see restricted hunting hours.

vvv. Trash everywhere pitiful

www. I'm a regular visitor. The hunting will be ruined if it's turned into a wma. The private land guys are the reason the hunting is so good there. Ducks feel safe coming to this lake

xxx. Woody encroachment and habitat quality has declined markedly since LDWF was barred from management of now-private land. However public access is now better with the expansion of Dewey Wills WMA, and if USFWS would secure their portion of the lakebed, BOTH enhancing public access AND re-establishing the waterfowl refuge could be done. Whatever happens, it can NOT go back to the wide-open, unregulated, access controlled through squatting and intimidation that was the situation prior to the lawsuit.

yyy. The lake is in decline you have no refuge for ducks. . The guides on the new ".private" run off what birds do show up . A small group of guides hunt the entire lake chasing what birds do show up. Ducks must have feed and a refuge on Catahoula LAKE. The recent changes have not only destroyed the lake but many lives and traditions surrounding the lake. Please do what is right. Remember in life for evil to flourish it only requires good men to do nothing. Don't be those good men who fail to act. Be men or women of character and do what's necessary.

zzz. Regular Visitor

aaaa. i am not very old ive only been hunting 16 years (ever since i was old enough to walk) although i only vividly remember around 10 of those 16 years i have grown to realize the very blinds i cut my teeth on as a baby have slowly started to produce less and less successful hunts many people like to blame it on heated ponds in the northern parts of the us and canada but those heated ponds don't unfreeze the feed for the birds and they have to eat to survive so the birds eventually do have to make there way down south also many people will look at the farmers almanac such as myself and if you pay attention you will realize many of our rice farmers down south have began ti grow more and more sugar cane and less rice so that could possibly or could possibly not have an effect on it but i think catahoula lakes biggest issue is that over the past several years it appears almost as if someone has started to let their toddler be in control of the locks controlling the water level it has been inconsistent the past several years its such an issue

i've begun to think that someone might be doing it on purpose the way every year right before season they let the water rise and kill all the feed that the lake naturally produces when its dry

bbbb. Overgrowth of trees and bushes in the lake. Roadways to landings are not maintained. French Fork landing needs to be re-worked for a safer launch

cccc. Haven't been in 4-5 years now. Too crowded

dddd. The water elems are taking over. Still beautiful. I hate that the people lost the lake. I feel like the rich will be hunting one side and the poor will be funding a rest area on the other side

eeee. It's a total disgrace what has happen with the lake. Its been call a lake for 150 year and now just because a crook tax acessore named crooks and other for monetary gain. Flooded corn in northern state that has be allowed that has altered the natural migration of waterfowl should be outlawed immediately

ffff. White perch population seems in serious decline last five years.

gggg. I would like to first say thank you for giving the public somewhere to hunt on Catahoula lake without being ran out of blinds owned on public property. One major issue ive personally experienced is that without a rest area the whole area was affected, not just Catahoula lake. The surface drive motors and no rest area has caused the majority of waterfowl to abandon the lake. I personally think it should be paddle or walk in only with a rest area. I believe that would be beneficial for all of central louisiana. Thanks Jonathan Montgomery

hhhh. Water level and season open to early

iiii. Over grown and need to allow atvs and sxs back in the lake bed for access to far to walk from the tree line

jjjj. Not managing the lake levels has been a huge impact on the hunting and fishing

kkkk. Landowners trying to post public land

llll. Without the refuge the ducks don't have a place to rest on the lake. Limited access would also help keep ducks on the lake.