

April 2010

Mr. Ed Hegen
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
Lower Coast Regional Director
702 Navigation Circle
Rockport, TX 78382

Dear Mr. Hegen,

I have been fly fishing the shallow flats of Redfish and Aransas Bay area since 1982 and guiding fly fisherman since 2001. While there have always been a few airboats working in the area, and in the past it was not unusual to occasionally see or hear an airboat but it was certainly not common.

Three years ago the number increased to maybe a half dozen airboats and it became a daily event to cross paths with an airboat in the course of a day of fishing. This year the number of airboats running in the area has exploded and it is impossible to spend a day of fishing without having airboats (plural) running around you. Yesterday I fished everything from Light House Lakes to Spalding Byte and I was never out of sight not to mention earshot of an airboat running. There were four airboats running in the LHL, four fishing and one running sight-seeing tours, there was at least one and sometimes two airboats on Mud Island and an airboat in every lake on St Joseph Island. It has become impossible for me to provide my clients a day of fly-fishing with out having airboats burning the flats.

Disregarding the impact that the airboats are having on me, my guide service, other fisherman in the area and the ecosystem, the impact on the redfish is undeniable. As soon as the first airboat approaches an area all the redfish quit feeding and start running in nervous herds looking for deeper water or a way out of a lake. I can be in the lakes on St Joseph Island and I can hear the airboats when they launch them at Cove Harbor and Goose Island, which is a distance of 7 to 9 miles. I can feel the vibration from the airboat engine coming through the hull of my poling skiff when they are within a mile of me and by the time they are within sight of me all the redfish in the area are nervously running and do not settle down for about an hour. These days there is never an hour that there is not an airboat running as the method they use is to run the perimeter of a lake and herd all the redfish into a corner of the lake or a deep hole then stop upwind of them and throw live bait into the herd. They will only fish a couple of minutes because as soon as they hook up with a redfish the herd scatters and then they have to "round up" the redfish up again.

Airboat operators are fond of saying that airboats do not have an impact on the redfish. Airboat operators are oblivious to the impact they are having on the resource.

A couple of quotes from my clients the last two days:

"These airboat operators don't have much respect for other fisherman do they?"

"It sure is nice out here when there aren't any airboats running."

Sincerely,
Capt. Billy Trimble